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"And what rough beast its hour come round at last . . ."—*William Butler Yeats*

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# The Persistence of Myth

by *Erich Kahler*



TO MAKE a historical concept clear to ourselves, it helps to look for its verbal root. The Greek word *mythos*, most etymologists believe, goes back to *mū*, *mu*, which imitates an elementary sound such as the lowing of cattle, the growl of beasts or of thunder, and originally meant inarticulate sounding of all kinds: bellowing, booming, roaring (Lat. *mugire*, Fr. *mugir*), murmuring, humming, rumbling, groaning, *muttering*, or, in humans, non-verbal utterance with closed lips—and, by derivation, the closing of the mouth, *muteness* (Lat. *mutus*). From the same root comes the Greek verb *mūiein*, *myein*, to close up, to close the eyes, from which derive *mystery* and *mystic*, the secret rites and teachings. Myth and mystery, then, are connected in their origin.

By the linguistic process that so often turns a word into its opposite—as in the case of the Latin *muttire*, to mutter, and *mutus*, mute, becoming the French *mot*, word—in Greek *mu*, signifying inarticulate voicing with closed mouth, evolved into *mythos*, word.

And yet the meaning of the root sound carried over into the specialized meaning the Greeks ultimately attached to *mythos*. The poets and writers of early periods used *mythos* indiscriminately in the sense of *word* (Homer, for instance, in contraposition to *ergon*, deed); they scarcely distinguished it from other Greek terms for *word*: *epos* and *logos*. But gradually the uses become specific: *mythos* becomes the word as the most ancient, the original account of the origins of the world, in divine revela-

tion or sacred tradition, of gods and demi-gods and the genesis of the cosmos, cosmogony; and it comes to be sharply contrasted with *epos*, the word as human narration, and—from the Sophists on—with *logos*, the word as rational construction.

The maturing of human consciousness is reflected in the great step from *mythos* to *logos*, from the dark tales of the emergence of cosmos from chaos as told in the early Greek myths, to the Judaeo-Christian Word of God, through which the Creator by an act of mind and will brought into being and shaped the world, and which in itself contains all Creation.

Yet *mythos* has never been completely obliterated by *logos*; it has persisted through all the ages until today. It can no more be abolished by reason than the deepest, elementary layers of our existence and our world can be completely penetrated by rational thinking. But myth has in itself been subject to changes in which the evolution of our thinking and our consciousness has left its traces; it has indeed taken on the forms, methods and results of our rational achievements and has consequently become sometimes difficult to identify.

Still, in the Greek concept of *mythos* we can find all the essential features and recognize all the transformations myth has undergone up to our own day. The essentials of myth: it deals with the fundamentals of our existence; it does not explain, but simply relates; its material issues from an anonymous source, or one that has become anonymous; its assumptions are unquestioned, surrounded by an aura of sanctity and venerability; it bears with it a kind of awesome breath from regions unreachable.

In its primary form, mythology proper, the naive tradition is one with what it transmits—the genesis of the world and the life of gods. The past is one with the present, both partake of timelessness in a kind of confluence of the eternal and the immediate. That means—and it even has a bearing on the operation of myth in our time—that mythology was a form of life and behavior. "There is no gap between thinking and doing . . . In antiquity the ego, and its consciousness of itself, is said to have had the door open to the past which entered into it and in it was re-enacted,

was 'there again' . . . In antiquity man found reason enough in the *world* to experience his gods as real. Just so it was his *life* that tended to enter into the creations of his mythology and to verify them."<sup>1</sup> This earliest stage of "living in myth" cropped up again even in Napoleon who "regretted that the modern state of consciousness did not permit him to proclaim himself the son of Jupiter-Amon, like Alexander. But there is little question that at the time of his Oriental enterprise he mythically took himself at least for Alexander, and later, when he settled for the Occident, he declared: 'I *am* Charlemagne.' Note—not 'In me, the world recalls him,' not 'My position is similar to his.' Not even 'I am like him,' but simply 'I *am* he.' That is the formula of myth."<sup>2</sup>

At first, then, myth appears as *given*—born, not made. But soon the "makers," the poets (from *poiein*, to make) begin to elaborate and embellish it, to interweave it with new fictions. When the work of the poets becomes embodied in the memory of the people and sanctified by tradition the unquestioned authority of myth is transferred to them and what they tell of. The human beings themselves who had enlarged the myth come to be included in it; they—the poets, the seers and the sages—are supposed to be inspired by the gods. Their figures and their lives are endowed with mythical traits, as in the case of the early Greek philosophers and the founders and prophets of Oriental religions. Empedocles and Elijah are examples: both, the one flinging himself into Aetna, the other borne up to the skies in a whirlwind, show their connection with a primal beyond, are restored to the depth or height of the cosmos.

Platonic philosophy introduces a rationalization of myth, or, to put it the other way round, shapes the newly discovered human system of logical thinking into a new mythology. Plato attempted to invalidate the ancient mythical stories of the personal gods and in their place set up a mythology of Ideas as Archetypes, of a world-soul and Demiurge.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Kerényi: *Die antike Religion*, Amsterdam, 1940. The anonymous quotations refer to a passage in Thomas Mann's *Freud and the Future*. The anonymity may be due to a special regard for German censorship.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Mann: *Freud and the Future*.

Here a second form of myth arises: the mythization of explicitly human thoughts and creations. In Plato the habit of seeing the world as myth was still so ingrained that his account of the world of human thinking assumed an immediately and involuntarily mythical character. This process, the mythization of human elements, later becomes more distinct, that is: purely historical, flesh-and-blood people and events, even man-made, rationally planned events, were retrospectively transformed into myth.

Figures, whether of fact or fiction, insofar as they expressed destinies, aspirations, attitudes typical of man or particular groups, were invested with a mythical character. The most powerful of the medieval emperors, Charlemagne, Otto the Great, the two Fredericks of Hohenstaufen, as they weathered in popular memory, took on a mythical coloring and were endowed with all sorts of attributes from the stock of pagan Germanic or Christian worship. They had not died, but lived on in the deep interior of mountains, whence they were expected to emerge at a predestined hour as princes of peace and saviours of Christendom or the German people. For the French, indeed for the whole of nineteenth century posterity, Napoleon grew into a mythical configuration that had little in common with the actual man. For millions, Lenin, the progenitor of a new social order, has long since become a myth. And the miraculous rise of Hitler, his monstrous deeds, his ostentatious "inspiration," his eccentricities, and his habitations in the depths and heights of mountain fastnesses—all this made him a paradigm for mythization. Even while present he had become almost mythical, and in the mysterious circumstances of his traceless disappearance he may well have deliberately prepared his legendary survival.

All hero-worship involuntarily mythicizes. It involves a curious interplay of creating and at the same time bridging a distance: people set the hero apart by exaggerating his unusual traits and yet they seem urged to make him familiar by elaboration of details. The existence of the extraordinary affects human beings with a deep uneasiness. They seek and magnify and at the same

time fear it; they long for a reassuring connection with it; are impelled at times to enhance their ego by participating in it. Often, indeed, to keep nature within the bounds of rational explicability, they tend to regard the exceptional as supernatural. In reality, nature is strange enough: it contains in itself those fathomless reaches that used to be labelled "supernatural."

Any colorful historical figure, any adventurous career, in fact anything or anybody out of the ordinary in a village or city bears the seed of myth; the shudder that accompanies whatever is outlandish or anomalous may prompt its growth when the historic climate is favorable, that is, when some unrest in a people or a group furnishes the stimulus. The germs of the mythical are present always and everywhere. The people of today, who set such store by rationality and realism, are avid to hear about the personal habits of public personalities, and particularly about their most colorful and capricious vagaries; they are not aware that in doing so they are indulging in a rudimentary hankering to myth-size. The newspaper or radio man who reports a movie actress's longing for solitude or a prime minister's longing for lemons is the unwitting successor of the ancient bards.

Figures of fiction too grow to be myths: Don Quixote, Doctor Faustus, the Wandering Jew, Tyl Ulenspiegel, Rip van Winkle, Schweik—in all of them a typical human or folk character or landscape lives as an irrational image, that can only be described, but not *explained* or referred back any farther than exactly that specific appearance and experience. In such figures people recognize themselves, in them they find their timeless ancestors or archetypes, their spiritual progenitors. But while ancient mythologies, in the eyes of men, possessed a direct reality, comparable to that of historical events, the reality of these modern myths is only the abstract, condensed one of the symbol.

The Age of Rationalism, to be sure, has made myth illegitimate and denied it all significance for our life. Our world—so it was thought—was increasingly to be constructed and determined by logic and empirical investigation alone. While this goal was being confidently aimed at, a subterranean process of mythization

went on unobserved, slipped in from a quarter where it was least suspected: from the rationalistic premises themselves.

The events or acts that in the Enlightenment initiated the modern democratic state: the French Revolution, the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution, and, above all, the ideas and premises on which the new political order was based, Natural Law, civil liberties, the idea of Progress, and of the un-failing beneficence of technical advances—all these were subject to an anonymous, unperceived process of mythization. Thorstein Veblen in his book *The Theory of Business Enterprise* has shown how the whole of Anglo-American jurisprudence and civilization is founded on the assumption of the sanctity of property as an inalienable Right of Man. Indeed, the doctrine of the omnipotence of reason has itself become a myth.

All this was mythized by being established, once and for all, as the inviolable foundation of our modern world, by being accepted as sacrosanct. The Enlightenment has become the cosmogony of our civilization. People willingly forgot, with all their belief in progress, that human conditions are not stable, but subject to perpetual change, and that the basic assumptions on which their systems rest have to be re-examined again and again if the process of mythization and dogmatization is to be kept from spreading boundless roots and over-running the original rational meanings. The old vitality of myth, its indestructible claim on human life, is always ready to surge up again. The initial tests of reason do not guarantee an unlimited or permanent validity of principles. Hence arises the paradoxical situation that the assumptions of the rationalistic order have to be questioned in order to meet their very claim to rationality. The indelibility, the mythical immutability of those assumptions must be abolished. And this has to begin with the recognition of the very fact *that* their compulsion is mythical, that the whole of our life and world is founded on myths and interspersed with myths, that indeed it is myth that has an indestructible reality in human beings, and that it answers an elementary urge in man. In our scientific thinking, we have come to realize today that all basic assumptions in any

rational structure worthy of the name are "assumptions," that is, postulates. The "axiom" of old is a kind of myth or partakes of the quality of myth.

Mythization springs not only from human inertia, not only from the steady regeneration of the mythical urge, but also from man's fear of change, from his need to protect himself against the disruption or dislocation of the underpinnings of his life. In the early, religious ages the foundation of life was the divine, in whose all-powerful being and rule the incalculability of all ultimate foundations was openly admitted and the dread of the impenetrable was localized and allayed. Myth was one means of getting hold of divinity, of bringing it closer, of making it familiar, of establishing a reassuring connection between man and god. Magic, conjuration, was another such means.

Since then, the cosmos and the origins of man and his institutions have been divested of their divinity. The cosmos is open to infinite research, and in his own history man has experienced change, the transformations of his modes of life. He has made reason, its judgments and conclusions, the firm grounds on which he may safely carry on his daily bustling, alterations and material progress. For this purpose, for his ease of mind, he wants to have reason stable, to place it beyond doubt; and this he does unconsciously by mythisizing it. In this way mythization has lost its concreteness; it no longer takes shape in images or idols, but has become a pure function.

Man's dread of fundamental change, of the chasms opened by fundamental change, man's dread of himself and his own inner depths, which he prefers to leave undisturbed, these anxieties are exploited by forces that have a stake in preserving the status quo and are opposed to any far-reaching reform. These "conservative" forces, therefore, purposely cultivate the general tendency to mythisize the foundations of the state and the traditional way of life, and even block where possible the very discussion of them. No matter how rational the original foundations may have been, in becoming inviolable and sacrosanct they assume a more and more irrational character.

The fascist movements drew the final consequences of all this; they simply went ahead and manufactured their own myths for their own purposes: the inspired Führer, the Hierarchy, the Master Race, etc. And even when they formulated this mythology in contemporary scientific terms they openly admitted its irrationality and on that basis began their campaign against reason. With the aid of these handy new myths and their statutory inviolability the Nazis succeeded in undercutting the moral supports of our civilization—supports that in their turn rested on principles long since lapsed into the mythical. In this the Nazis have done us a service: what had seemed merely desirable they have made necessary; we on our part are forced to reshape the principles of our civilization, to submit them to the test of our present-day knowledge and, on the other hand, to make them effective in our present-day life.

Fascism exposed a basic need of the human psyche, one that the age of rationalism refused to recognize. The longing for a fixed, unreasoned ground of existence cannot be altogether extinguished. We do not meet the dangers inherent in this human propensity by denying it, regarding it as overcome or to be overcome, or as the residue of ancient superstition, but only by recognizing it and taking it into account. In fact, today, such an urge is more natural than ever. Not only does the individual in his everyday life feel helplessly ensnared in a chaotic skein which he is unable to disentangle by reasoning, but even at the most advanced front of human knowledge a situation has been reached where an extreme expansion of man's power at the same time brings him to realize anew the extent of his ancient powerlessness to resolve the cosmos. The boundaries of our reason become more and more clear, and the rationalistic overconfidence in an unlimited domination of nature by reason has been discouraged by natural science itself. In its recent stupendous advances, physics has arrived at a border region that seems to refuse itself to rational penetration. It has pushed forward into the realms of the submicroscopic, where phenomena can no longer be pictured, but only schematized, that is, symbolized; so deep into the innermost structure of

the elements that it has discovered their modes of transformation one into the other and so has come to recognize the elements themselves as being only specific arrangements, linkages of general energies. It has not only shown the total transformation of matter, but matter *as* transformation, and has even reproduced this transformation and made it a tool of man.

Physics, at a new level, merges the inner and outer world, postulates on epistemological grounds a unity that was taken for granted in early, religious periods. Between the observer and the observed there exists a perpetual interaction: one continually affects and changes the other. The findings of research, by completely dissolving the object into a complex of relations, have led the physicists ever farther away from the sphere of sense perceptions into one of abstract conceptions, that can only be mathematically symbolized, and of indirect verifications, that is, into the realm of the invisible. Research moves through conceptual operations and the operating mind, recognized as a factor conditioning what it formulates, comes to be placed inside, not outside, the event. In this, physics, starting with the external, curiously corresponds with the preceding theory of psychoanalysis, which, starting with the internal, has effected a merging of the outer and the inner world by seeing reactions that are directed outward as projections of inner situations. Physics has, by its very triumph, stirred in man the primeval shudder in the face of the impenetrable reaches re-emerging at the borders of the outer world; psychoanalysis has revealed man's disguised dread of his inner depths. But physics, as well as psychoanalysis, has shown that these anxieties are functions of each other, that they are one and the same dread of the unknown, which is the true source of myth.

There is a level of events in the universe and in man that research itself more and more demonstrates to be inaccessible to reason. A rational control of our world is only possible within certain limits and valid only for limited periods. Nothing can be accepted as final—the final becomes mythical. We have to be constantly on the alert to examine and re-examine the founda-

tions on which we live and not to recoil from rebuilding our systems as those foundations shift. We must become accustomed to living on that floating ground on which science has moved for so long.

# The Secular Hell

by Louise Bogan



Was von Menschen nicht gewusst  
Oder nicht bedacht  
Durch das Labyrinth der Brust  
Wandelt bei der Nacht.

—Goethe: *An den Mond*

THE "CLASSIC" MYTH is fresh, subtle and varied. Its variety is the result of a long process of accretion, stratification and absorption. Its subtlety is the crystallization of "mankind's deepest emotions." It is saturated with meaning; no matter how deeply we explore it, an irreducible residue of unconscious allusiveness remains inexplicable in any terms but the original legendary ones. The luminous primordial scene surrounds it; in a light that is still large, mankind's earliest awe before, and pleasure in, natural phenomena appears. The details are often, to use the Victorian term often applied to them, "repulsive" in the extreme. We can still respond, however, in spite of our modern knowledge of the myth's darkest sources, to Schlegel's definition: "The myth is a hieroglyphic expression of environment nature under the transfiguration of imagination and love."

Even a partial listing of the labors of Herakles, for example, shows the broadness and richness of the imaginative forces involved. "The capture of the Cerynean hind; the procuring of the girdle of Hippolyte; the cleaning of the Augean stables . . . the fetching of the red cattle of Geryon;" and then, with "the procuring of the golden apples of the Hesperides" we are transported into a climate of pristine beauty. The labors are translated into a region outside the material world, and the material world is exquisitely changed thereby.

\* \* \*

The Hero as Transcendent Breaker of the Taboo stands at the center of many myths. But the taboo is not broken at once, or without previous bafflement. Before the hero takes on full responsibility, full guilt, he must at least once face up to insoluble mystery, be completely humiliated, or be changed into a compelling "opposite." The myth does not set up a series of material barriers only. One test is never actually passed; through and around it we hear the laughter of the Powers. It is when we see Herakles a prisoner of Lydian Omphale (who wears his lion-skin) that the story begins to vibrate with mystery and passes over into the "truth" of the dream. Beyond the crisis—and it is always great and compelling—of the final assumption of guilt, lies the irreducible strangeness of strength face to face with a spiritual or physical Force it cannot move, change, or understand. Oedipus before the Sphinx, Christ in the Wilderness and in the Garden, Herakles among the women: it is at these points that the myth opens another dimension to our view—a dimension to which we can as yet give no name, with which religion and poetry themselves can deal only tentatively and in part.

\* \* \*

It is the rite which enables the individual to participate directly in the myth. The myth always moves toward the rite. It can only be *lived*, through the rite. Religious ritual codifies, stiffens and rationalizes. But the rite also reassures and shares; sometimes, it would seem, its operation is almost entirely fear-dissolving in character. But, as Roger Caillois has pointed out, in his interesting survey of the "sacred" (*L'Homme et le Sacré*, Paris, 1939), a religion at a high point of health and effectiveness often allows, within whatever culture it operates, the occasional functioning of "permitted license" of an extreme kind. The institution of the festival—(the feast-day, the holiday, the *fête*) during which rules are broken, sacrilege is at least ritually allowed, the profane is permitted to break into the stronghold of the holy, and authority is mocked—brings into a religion bound by the strictness of rules, not only a relief for pent-up energies, but a refreshment based

on a return to older, and otherwise disguised, rites of fertility and "creation."

When a religion begins to lose health, it is always the releasing rites which are the first to disappear. The threatened organization puts increasing pressure upon rituals of *atonement*, and begins actively to persecute "the heretic." The ideas of the Sublime and the Numinous dwindle into superstitions ever proliferating into smaller details. Meanwhile, the dammed up energies of "the faithful," once provided for by the ritually controlled "festival," break out in a persecutory manner toward any activity which seems to duplicate "the festival." The "myth" begins to float freely in the culture into which it has been loosed. It turns up in unexpected places—not only in literature and art, but in the general ethos of the society. And it is always "Hell" which breaks loose, as "Heaven" fades out. The magic which religion straitens and controls for its own purposes; the "will" that religion tames; the fear and guilt which religious practise resolves and accommodates—all these escape into "the profane." The magician and sorcerer (who "wish to coerce nature, instead of allying themselves with it") take up the priest's power. The individual conscience, meanwhile, is asked to bear the full weight of the individual's transgressions.

The dispossessed festival and the fertility rites now become obsessions. Malice and envy walk freely abroad. No force is available to confront Evil but more Evil. It is the Time of Demons, as well as of new—unrecognized—"mythmaking" power.

\* \* \*

The witch and the warlock stand as twin "mythical" figures at the beginning of the modern world. A "white witch" Jeanne D'Arc is burned at the stake in 1431; but it is the figure of her comrade-in-arms, Gilles de Rais—the child-killing "Bluebeard"—that continues to fascinate the popular mind. And soon the terror and fascinated dread of sorcery and witchcraft is codified and fixed in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486 or a little later): a work which "spread widely and became for centuries the great formulation of the Catholic attack on sorcery." And now the fig-

ures of the witch and of the heretic merge. The repetitive pattern of the witch-coven rituals is faced by the repetitive pattern of the witch-trials. When, late in the seventeenth century, after prolonged and multiplied horror, the belief in witchcraft dies out, it was more from pure exhaustion than because of the light of reason newly shed upon it. The last English witchcraft trials occur in 1717; the last Scottish trial in 1722; and at last we hear Tam O'Shanter's healthy drunken laughter as he watches the still-feared witch revels "through the Gothic window in the ruins of Kirk-Alloway."

Lines of origin of the witch-myth reach back to the Old Testament and the Greek and Roman worlds; yet there is little doubt that its later European manifestations were rooted in the post-mediaeval break-down of religion. The persecutions in England, for example, reached their height after Elizabeth. It is when a myth of this kind seizes the imagination, and affords an outlet for the passions of a whole society, that dangerous things happen. "Historic and social facts" then cease to be "the envelope in which the myth lies"; and become instead the bases of power on which it feeds.

\* \* \*

At the heart of an "age of reason" look for a counter-development of irrationality. It is interesting to consider the character and career of John Wesley in this connection. Wesley's life roughly coincided with the years of the eighteenth century. He succeeded in channelling the religious "enthusiasm" present in England since the Reformation, in one form and degree of intensity or another, into a compelling "personal" religious movement: the Methodist Revival. This "great, practical religious manifestation" was considered by Leslie Stephen to be the most important event of the eighteenth century in England. Methodism took into account the deprivations, spiritual and material, of the English lower classes. It gave them an outlet, in the revival meeting, for their emotions; and, if not a ritual, at least a new kind of permitted license. This, too, was the great age of the English hymn. Wesley, a practical man and a great organizer was, on one side,

according to the records, a witch-hunter *manqué*. "A firm believer in ghosts and apparitions," he was opposed to the repeal of the witchcraft statutes (1735) and he wrote, when over eighty, an account of the haunting of his father's Parsonage at Epworth by a "noisy ghost," or poltergeist, ascribing these peculiar disturbances to witchcraft. He thus sums up, as a transitional figure, many of the floating myths of a transitional age.

\* \* \*

"The word *enthusiasm* was anathema to the polite in the eighteenth century." The English upper classes were totally immune to the revivalism of the poor. Yet from the middle of the century through Napoleonic times the class which, in Gibbon and Hume, had thrown up extreme examples of "the sceptic and infidel" was swept into an "enthusiasm" of its own—an interest which became a mania: the passion for "Gothic" and particularly for the "Gothic romances." The "graveyard poets" opened the path for Bishop Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) and Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764). At the end of the century the flood of Gothic novels was in full spate. The preoccupation of these productions with the "trappings" of an outlawed Catholic ritual was marked. The cloister, abbots, monks, nuns, friars, convents, priories and the anchorite's retreat crowded out other wild and gloomy preoccupations, such as bandits, robbers and spectres. *The Confessor*, *The Haunted Priory*, *The Horror of Oakendale Abbey*, *The Hermit's Cave*, *The Children of the Abbey*, and the tremendously successful *The Monk*, by Matthew Gregory Lewis; ruins, underground passages, midnight—all these expressed "the triumph of chaos versus order" in the fiction of the period.

The thoroughness with which the Gothic romance—in a time when the feeling against superstition ran high and anti-Papist riots broke loose—canvassed every smallest detail of a former religiously-based age, indicates that some life-giving forces had been omitted from "enlightenment." The imagination alone knew what had been lost. From the ruined halls, the broken monastery arches, the toppling and devastated churches, a life-giving

breath of hell arose, and the reasonable man turned again and again to his brother, the fallen angel and the proud fiend.

\* \* \*

"The liberal ideal," says Croce in his *History of Europe in the 19th Century*, "contains what is essential and intrinsic in every religion: a concept of reality and an ethic that conforms to this concept. It excludes the mythological element, which constitutes only a *secondary differentiation between religion and philosophy*. The concept of reality and the conforming ethics of liberalism are generated . . . by modern thought, dialectical and historical. Nothing more was needed to give them a religious character, since personifications, myths, legends, dogmas, rites, propitiations, expiations, priestly classes, pontifical robes and the like *do not belong to the intrinsic* (italics mine) . . . But the religion of liberalism showed itself to be essentially religious in its forms and institutions, and, since it was born, and not made, was no cold and deliberate device."

Let us oppose to this rather shallow misconception of the nature of "liberalism" and the modern worthlessness of the myth, a passage by Jung (*Psychology and Religion*, 1938): "In the last two thousand years we find the Christian Church assuming a mediating and protective function between 'supernatural' influences, and man. Protestantism, having pulled away many a wall that had been carefully erected by the Church, began immediately to experience the disintegrating and schismatic effect of individual revelation. . . . As soon as the dogmatic fence was broken down and as soon as ritual lost its efficiency, man was confronted with an inner experience, without the protection and guidance of a dogma and a ritual which are the unparalleled quintessence of Christian as well as of pagan religious experience. . . ."

\* \* \*

"The hero as implicated in mythical situations is he who finds a solution: an upshot, an issue, fortunate or unfortunate. For the individual suffers above all from not being able to get out from the conflict of which he is the prey." The role of active hero comes to a point of stasis in Hamlet. The chosen breaker of the

taboo is now baffled by the taboo. Beyond Hamlet, Faust begins a new role, a role which, in the modern "liberal" world, has become usual and "archetypal." Faust acts; but he must be split in order to act. "In Faust the crisis of modern thought is very clearly reflected," says Croce (with more insight) elsewhere, "when, having shaken off traditional beliefs, it began to perceive the emptiness of the rationalistic philosophy which had taken their place. . . . Two souls dwell in Faust, and the one wishes to separate itself from the other. His condition is the condition of a sick man."

A refinement of this splitting of the hero's "soul" occurs when the opposing forces begin a grim action of flight on the part of one, and pursuit on the part of the other. This theme is as old as the myth of Orestes. But from the beginning of the nineteenth century to our own day, this pattern begins to absorb other myths in great variety. And as the modern myth becomes less "repulsive" in detail, it becomes increasingly ambiguous, and weighted with both guilt and fear. Caleb Williams, in Godwin's cautionary tale is *pursued by the murderer*. The shift in roles between Jean Valjean and Javert (who finally is pursuer or pursued; who at last is hero or hunted?) fixes a symptomatic situation from which the modern mind does not seem able to escape.

Society has been seen ostensibly to move in one direction toward certain "ideals" and goals, when actually it was unconsciously being drawn in a totally opposite direction. The birth of a new myth lets free new springs of energy. "The passions are good": this was the truth, spoken in "the language of Satan," that the nineteenth century, through the ferment of the Romantic Movement, was finally forced to learn. For the myth is never completely contemporaneous. As we have seen, it can regress, in order to gather up suppressed material needed for new life. It is also supremely capable of shooting ahead. It may point toward the region wherein some enlargement of the human consciousness is about to occur. Even the "Gothic" exploration of the "night-side of Nature" and the Romantic emphasis upon an (at the time) outmoded demonic, fatal, "insatiable" hero, pointed inexorably at unconscious complexities and needs which only a later century

was equipped to face, and find analytical means to explain and resolve.

It is now mainly to literature and art that we must look for clues to the unconscious processes. Does our need for "the numinous"—"the fearful, the uncanny, the dauntingly 'other'"—become fixed, and, as it were, trapped, in our crime novels and "murder" stories? "It is curious," says a contemporary observer, "how the great Victorian writers moved instinctively toward a tale of scandal and spiritual corruption. . . . The preoccupation grows stronger as the great bourgeois period becomes self-confident." Compared with the richness, fullness and solidity of the Romantic and the Victorian imaginative productions, we are currently presented with dryness, thinness, fixity and attenuation. Where is the valuable and revivifying darkness in the glaring sea-shores, the empty horizons of Chirico, Dali and the surrealists? Nature is dead; we are pushed to an extreme verge of the physical and spiritual world, our only companions a litter of half-human furniture, of wrecked bare forms, of amorphous abstractions.

By attending with intense and detached interest to what the imagination (at all levels) presents to us, we may hope to catch at times a hint concerning the myth that is forming at the heart of our world. The hero, for example, reaches crucial modern expression in Kafka. *The Castle* and *The Trial* show to us a nearly unbearable extreme of powerlessness in the face of the unknown. Here everything "means something"; we share the obsessive suspicions of the insane; everything whispers, cunningly cajoles and promises hollowly; accuses and waits. In "crime novels" we are continually confronted with the "victim." Are we building up a symbolical kind of *printed* bloodless shedding of blood (a sacrifice being defined as "the giving of life to promote and preserve life, to establish union between the individual and the unseen forces that surround him.")? What quiver of meaning, present and future, stirs in the hunting and "detecting" malice, in the fugitive's panic and guile with which our "popular" (and unpopular) literature is saturated?

Dread, in literature, has now shifted from the outer to the inner scene. Terrible events now take place in the most usual surroundings to the most ordinary people. Here is the suppressed personality as antagonist (in Conan Doyle, John Buchan and countless others). And from time to time we see the myth, formed and whole, in a piece of fiction whose surface and conscious intention is rational or didactic: a birth-myth in a fantasy concerned with orthodox religion; the "father-found-and-murdered-underground," in a novel on a "social theme." And in Graham Greene we encounter the hero conscious of inner guilt, who draws to himself the outer guilty situations as a magnet draws iron.

Instinctively, "liberal" man has built around himself half-formed ritual, and occasions for vicarious expiations and propitiations. He has turned toward healing mystery and "the shudder."

Das Schaudern ist der Menschheit bester Teil.  
Wie auch die Welt ihm das Gefühl verteuere,  
Ergriffen fühlt er tief das Ungeheure.

It is Goethe who speaks these words, to explain the possible virtue inherent in our compulsive patterns of panic, terror and flight.

# Myth and Initiation

by *Nicolas Calas*



## I

THE CONFUSION created by the misuse of the term myth has to be overcome by a more precise understanding of the nature of myths. The distinction established by Aristotle between *true* and *mythical explanation* no longer corresponds to present epistemological requirements and can only be the source of misunderstandings. It would be preferable to substitute for myth, in the Aristotelian sense of the word, the more neutral term *fiction*.

The term fiction has functional value, as contrasted with the ontological value attributable to history. Fiction implies an elaboration of a system of relationships by which a given total situation is comprehended. Thus we can speak of legal fiction when we want to understand statutory or contractual relationships in their entirety; of poetic fictions when the elements of the system are imaginary; of scientific fictions when the elements of the fiction are abstract. History's main purpose is to trace cause and effects which involve identifications. Both history and fiction are valuable tools for our understanding.

It is not fiction that science avoids but beliefs in *legends* and *illusions*. From legends—stories credited by those who relate them as being partly true—the investigator will isolate the historical fact from an imaginary setting. While legends are based upon an imaginary elaboration of authentic data, illusions are the consequence of the belief in the reality of two given facts, out of which only one is actual. When Columbus believed that he had

landed in India he was the victim of an illusion, i.e., of the belief that the ground he set foot on was in Asia. But Freud very acutely points out that an illusion may sometimes become true and quotes the example of the poor girl who may eventually marry the happy prince of her day-dreams. Columbus' illusion results from an error in space, while the girl's illusion depends on its realization in time. Errors in time must be kept in mind when analyzing myths and *utopiae*. Utopiae are merely projections, on a less personal and wider scale, of Cinderella's longing for a happy future.

## II

It is not sufficient to define myth negatively, by distinguishing it from science and fiction; it must also be understood historically. To the extent that a myth is fictitious in its process of elaboration one must start by uncovering the origin of fiction. Fiction is an elaboration of symbols, that is to say of signs to which man attributes value. The nature of symbols is either social or psychological: we call them social when they are collective, and psychological when they are individual. Collective symbols are religious in their origin, as Emile Durkheim has conclusively demonstrated; while individual symbols find their maturest expression through sublimation in art. Because of the collective nature of myths their origin has to be traced to symbols and fictions belonging to religious institutions.

According to Malinowski, one characteristic of myths is that it accounts for social inequality, i.e., their purpose is to explain the origin of differences in a way that would satisfy the needs of a given group. In so far as a myth accounts for social differences it corresponds to a legal fiction; but in so far as it attempts to justify in legal terms the status quo it serves a historical function; while lastly, in as much as it pretends to create a future freed from wrongs, it is utopian.

### I I I

A myth is the creation of a group which has the need to believe in it and it is valid only to those who benefit by it through belonging to the group (however marginally they may be led to identify themselves with it). The solidarity of a group is enforced through the requirement of *initiation*. Initiation is a mystery and it is revealing that mystery and myth have the same root. The significance of a myth can only be properly determined after the social value of the initiation has been established. We can speak of the literary or historical value of a myth without referring to initiation, but we cannot speak of the social value of a myth without evaluating initiation.

To demand the creation of a new myth, as some would, or to condemn all myths is false in that it betrays a misunderstanding of the dynamics of culture. Marxian dialectics, democratic liberalism, totalitarian racial theories, and patriotic nationalism are concepts which can be properly appraised only when examined mythologically.

While a myth is living it can run the gamut from initiation to utopia. A myth should be accepted for the value placed on initiation rather than for promises of achievements in the utopian future. Those who in their search for justice and equality join a group which claims to be fighting for those values, only to discover later that the group does not adhere to its avowed pronouncements, have committed the error of reading the myth backwards, i.e., of taking utopia at its face value.

### I V

The existence of myth depends on initiation; the modality of this existence will be determined by both the *nature* and the *character* of the existence of the initiated group.

[I] As by *nature* a group is social it is not possible to analyze it psychologically and in terms of *being*, but only sociologically and in terms of *doing*. Seen as vector, the starting point is the

moment of decision, while the point of arrival is the materialization of the transformation previously decided upon.

[2] *Character:*

(a) There are three types of myths: general, particular, and individual. *General* myths are those conditioning the group's whole cultural life—(the most obvious contemporary myths of this type are marxism and fascism). If these myths involve the observance of regularly repeated ceremonies they lead to the establishment of a church and become *religious*. *Particular* myths are those serving the interests of individuals who find themselves in an exceptional condition within the group—(those involving exorcism and psychoanalysis). Lastly, *individual* myths are those which have been elaborated around a hero of the group. A typical American myth of this type is the story of George Washington and the Cherry Tree—(mythologically an adaptation of the Hebraic idea of the Tree of Life to the individualistic ideals of democracy).

(b) Myth is further differentiated by its *intensity*, that is to say by the amount of pain inflicted by initiation, either in terms of bodily sufferings, such as incisions and tatooings, or in terms of anxiety, such as is entailed by the joining of the underground in totalitarian states.

(c) According to whether myths derive from groups whose activity is accepted or opposed by the dominant class they will tend to become religious or magical. (In Russia, before 1917, Marxist groups had a magic character, but today they have acquired a religious one).

# Old Myths of the New World

*by Mario Monteforte-Toledo*



THE BOUNDARIES between human and divine in the first hours of humanity were faint. Alone, terrorized by his doubts, facing the immensity of nature, man created gods in order to explain the supernatural, which was the totality of his world. As he fathomed the mysteries and achieved mechanical skill his arrogance swelled, and he bestowed divinity upon himself, the memory of his humble origin vanishing from his mind; gods and men communed, struggled and even procreated with one another; through this process deities became more human and men more sublime. Later on, an increasing number of phenomena were regarded as natural and even they were subjects of mythological explanations, but at this stage myths were originated by a preoccupation which was esthetic rather than symbolic, since the great equations of life and death were already solved by complete systems of cosmogony. In the course of centuries, as the world expanded within the mind of man, myths became less powerful and the legend, in which the human being is capable of the marvelous and the heroic, came forth.

Man never recovers from the impact of his first environment and the impressions of his childhood as a superior being. The mythology of the first epochs, whose structure depends on the genius of each race and the influence of local elements, conditions the future attitude towards life as in a Freudian diagnosis of an individual.

Hence the impossibility of penetrating into the profound sense of the most advanced artistic forms without a knowledge of the

mythological layers of the races to which they belong. Dante, Shakespeare or Goethe would be apprehensible only in their objective form and their merely human range if the sagas and the myths of Europe were unknown. In a similar manner, foreign languages do not resound within our minds or correspond to that which we strive to express because we are not familiar with the ancestry of every word in a truly semantic way. For language is another myth, with its germinative strength rooted in the distant past; as man forged gods and explored and tamed his world, he made beings, actions and things spout, as Prospero over his sea, by the simple utterance of words.

The eagerness to attach divinity to things and occurrences is almost an instinct. As all childish lips on earth pronounce their first words with *em's* and *be's*, a peculiar unity of character exists among primitive arts, however separated by time and space. Fire, death, rain, the mortal who attempts overpowering the gods and scores of other vital phenomena and symbols are explained in antipodal regions by analogous signs and denominations.

Therefore, whether the American myths are original to the New World or brought from other countries in the Mesolithic age or even before, is irrelevant. In a higher order of things the sole valid fact is that they are here, transformed, assimilated, latent perhaps, in the man-in-process dweller of America. Scientists have traced the symbol of the feathered snake of the Mayans and Aztecs back to the lands of Mesopotamia; they have discovered that the placing of *chalchihuit* (pebbles) under the tongue of the dead comes from China; they have explained the widespread use of the winged disk among Incas and Mayans as a notion borrowed from Egypt, where it represented the fusion of the Higher and Lower Empires under the sceptre of the ancient dynasties. The Mayans stylized the Asiatic elephant, despite the fact that such an animal did not exist in our continent, and Mayauel, the Aztec goddess of the four hundred breasts, is an exact replica of the goddess Hathor, in whom the Egyptians typified the mother deities (even their immediate attributes are alike: the turquoise, the connection with the sun). On the other hand, La Condamine

and Humboldt discovered vestiges of pre-Inca cultures in Ecuador, and developed the hypothesis (about the only one by which this intricate problem may be solved) that migrations from America to the other worlds may have been quite possible.

True enough, facts to which history attests reveal that the peoples of the New World contacted oriental and occidental societies in pre-Columbian days. Norman, Celtic and even Phoenician sagas spoke of the long westward journeys of mariners; the butterfly is associated with fire both in Scotland and Mexico; cultured Greeks knew the earth was round and obviously populated all over, and there are old tales of communication between countries overseas and the Western coast of Europe. Aztecs and Mayans related the origin of their empires to the myth of the fair-complexioned Quetzalcoatl, son of a virgin goddess and the breath of a god, who came from the Eastern sea and after teaching the tribes the secrets of their future splendor, departed on a raft of snakes, though promising to return; that is why the Aztecs and the Quiché Indians of Guatemala were not astounded when the Spanish conquistadores (some of them blónd) arrived. The Incas, in turn, told of giants who arrived from the Pacific and landed on their shores; Viracocha and Manco-Ccapac correspond to the fair-skinned hero of the Aztecs. So do Sumé and Payé-Tomé in Brazil, and Bochica among the Indians of Columbia. This god of the historical beginnings, "the plumed serpent" (Quetzalcoatl), is the source of manifold goods and useful creations and invariably is associated with verdure (like Osiris, "god of the green fields").

Of particular importance was the Mayan snake-lore. The snake stands for fecundity and is a symbol of the subservience of the earth's multiplying energy to the will of man; it is auspicious of rain, because in olden times the gods beheaded snakes in order to alleviate the sombre dryness of the world. Since the supernatural period there has always existed a god who is bound to both the serpent and the bird: Tlaloc of the Aztecs, Zamná of the Mayans, and Gucumatz of the Quichés—with the sea-shell on his breast and power over stars and thunderbolts, like Zeus in Greece, Thor

of the Germanic tribes, and Indra in India. This deity, who contains two opposed cosmogonic symbols, is the dragon in China and *nāga* in India (where this conception is extremely old and attains its highest degree of esoteric development).

It is in the Aztec myths that the god of the great geological cataclysms, rebel of the heavens, dispenser of germination and destruction in the world (as he appears in nearly all mythologies) is impersonated with greatest vigor. Tezcatlipoca, fleeing from the heavenly wrath descended to the earth by a spider's thread, inebriated Quetzalcoatl with *pulque* and drove him out of Tula, for which the gods cursed his star and made it run backwards in its course. He was represented with a smoking mirror in his hand, symbol of foresight (as Krishna); the Peruvian peoples, as well as the Greeks, Siamese and Chinese, had a cult of a stone mirror that refracts the sun's rays and generates fire. Tezcatlipoca granted justice with the same magnanimity with which he destroyed and killed and made love to manifold goddesses. Portrayed with garlands of hearts and skulls, this god is the Jurakan of the Caribes and the Kaprakan of the Quichés. The latter people believed that he made the fire gush from the volcanoes with the strokes of his sandal, devastated forests in his roamings and summoned the winds of the four horizons with the music of his flute.

Huitzilopochtli shares with Tezcatlipoca the highest rank in the Aztec pantheon. He was the god of war and, like Siegfried, he understood the language of birds. Coatlicue, the smiling goddess, laid on her bosom a globe of feathers that fell from the sky and conceived him. As she was about to be sacrificed by her sons, the god was born fully armed and in all the impressive severity of his black war-paint, and avenged her. He has more than one point in common with Shiva: cruel and contradictory, he is propitious to the abundance of the corn fields and leads men to supreme victories. He brought to an end the wanderings of the Aztecs and chose the valley of Tenochtitlan as the site of their future capital (now Mexico City); Quetzalcoatl has similar importance as a messiah for the Toltecs, and Manco-Ccapac for the Incas. The people offered him great feasts at the end of winter and summer,

fervently eating his image made of corn, honey and blood. But even though Huitzilopochtli was the object of this candid and poetic tribute as lord of the flourishing fields (like Maximon among the Tzutuhils of Guatemala) his frequent rages, as interpreted by the priests, called for hecatombs of human sacrifice.

Once the early American had conceived the creator gods, he tried to explain the formation of the world and all that is in it. The Mexican mythology is very complex in this respect; it seems to suggest that men germinated in a variety of ways. One of the stories reveals that when the goddess Citlalinicue gave birth to an obsidian knife in the Thirteenth Heaven, her infuriated sons smashed the stone against the earth and sixteen hundred minor gods emerged from its fragments. Only Xolotl, the provider, dared to recover a bone from the catastrophe and bring it back to the heavens. The deities sank the bone in blood and after a repose of four days a boy sprouted from the earthen pot; more blood was poured and a girl sprouted. From this couple the Aztec people arose. In Japan, Xolotl is Susa-no-wo and in Egypt, Bes. All these gods who saved the human species from nothingness became patrons later of the fecund dreams of maidens.

According to the Incas, Manco-Ccapac was a pilgrim of the Andes who made a dramatic search for the place where his wedge would sink into a soft fertile soil. Finally he found Cuzco, the navel of the world, and he moulded the first human creatures in clay. A divine contrivance turned these beings into falcons and solitary condors, and Manco-Ccapac had intercourse with his sister Oullo Huaca in order to people the empire with a superior race. In many respects the Peruvian myths cannot be compared to the Mexican or the Mayan either in imaginative richness or in philosophical content, but the Inca imagery has no peer as far as the interpretation of natural things is concerned. Lakes, rivers and abysses of the Andes could be *paccariscas*, sites from where the ancestors of things might arise, and there are numerous *mamas*, or instrumental spirits of the growing plants, whose miracles affect human life (the *nahual* of Toltecs and Quichés have the same meaning). These polytheistic beliefs enrich legend and

poetry. Yet there is only one major work of Inca literature that has an integrated form, the *Apu-Ollanta*, a sort of epic commemorating the foundation of the sacred city of Ollantay; it was not written down until the seventeenth century, but the Peruvian aborigines had handed it down orally from far earlier times.

The wealthiest mine of mythology in the New World is unquestionably the *Popol-Vuh*, the bible of the Quiché. It, too, was preserved orally for a long time in every detail of poetry and content; this should not be surprising, as the early Americans have given proof of astounding mnemonic ability.

A good many of the post-colonial expressions of the American Indians are so entangled with Spanish elements that one can hardly trace the original American matter. The Conquistadores and their successors, the priests, were so cunning ("ladino" is what the contemporary Indians still call the white man) that they nourished a war of symbols rather than a war of weapons in order to impose their culture upon the real owners of this continent. Where there was a Temple of the Sun, the cathedral was erected, and for more than three centuries a struggle between stone and cross, tribe and city, and the artistic values of the two hemispheres took place. But neither the terrors of the Inquisition and the *Casa de Contratación* nor the mellifluous sermons of the padres could erase entirely the accomplishments of the old race. The elders taught the youngsters the legends and secrets of their people in the hidden refuge of the caves, and both works and their creators went underground. The Spaniards knew the "corruptive" value of these manifestations and they tried to destroy them or to hide them. That is how the *Popol-Vuh* was preserved.

Probably divining what would happen to the traditions of his people, a wise Indian dictated the invaluable sacred book to a friar in the dawn of the colonial regime. The manuscript was found in the seventeenth century buried in a wall of the convent of Chichicastenango in Guatemala. Despite obvious distortions, by the first amanuensis, to lend a Catholic slant to the narrative, the power of the original conception remains in all its beauty.

The *Popol-Vuh* is divided into eleven Traditions or *Words*,

as the Quiché says. There is but one mythical and cosmogonic section, the rest being dedicated to the glory of the heroes and the history of the Quiché people. In the beginning, the four gods were placed in the heart of the universe and they formed the worlds according to the wishes of Cabagüil, the Heart of Heaven. After several attempts they created four men from a humid mass of corn, gave them the four women of their dreams and let them stay on earth because their prayers were indispensable to the divinities. From these four couples the great Quiché race descends.

The first of these Promethean men quarreled with the gods. There was Gukup-Cakix and his lineage of proud giants who were killed by the human incarnation of the sun and the moon. There was Ixquik, the maiden of the underworld, who was fecundated by the sap of a tree and ascended to the earth in order to multiply the half-exterminated race of men. At times men tried to deceive the gods so as to make them forget their unquenchable thirst for sacrifice, and sent their handsomest daughters to tempt them; but the gods flattered the gracious envoys with clothing embroidered with figures of tigers, eagles and wasps, which came to life and ate them. Finally Tohil, Lord of War and the Appalling Thunder taught the people how to make fire, as a means of starting wars for his own delight, and thus the misfortunes of the Quiché began. The tribes were left in the lurch by their four mythical directors, who became plain human beings incapable of the miraculous and the wondrous. The manuscript concludes with the genealogy of the three princely Quiché families, whose descendants are still alive.

The Indian mythologies of the other Americas have substantial traits in common. They conceive of a supreme spirit, without form, abstract and anterior to the whole, who inspires the subordinate gods to breathe life into preëxistent matter. The worlds invariably emerge from the water, for which the usual symbol is the feathered snake. Man is formed from real and earthly things (maize, wood, clay, stone), only after the gods have failed three or more times in their attempt to mold the final beings—as if the deities also were imperfect and incapable of supreme div-

ination. In fact, the gods are fickle, self-contradictory sources of both the worst cruelties and the most extravagant generosity. Because the knowledge of good and evil does not exist in Indian mythologies there is no retribution for good actions or punishment for sins (Hell was imported by the Spaniards). Man finishes his cycle in the world by his death and he walks to his last dwelling place in all his human dignity, with his weapons and the tools of his trade. And the world goes on, populated by growing humanity or by the gods, who can and do form new men as soon as cataclysms or obscure designs decimate the old.

The cult of pain, the deep faith in the germinative and purifying qualities of blood is typical of Indian cultures. The temples of the terrible Aztec and Inca gods were usually stained with the blood of propitiatory victims. But the human sacrifices were not less frequent among many of the most advanced occidental peoples such as the Greeks, for all their humanistic philosophy, frigid architecture and high ethical standards, or the Celts and Phoenicians; to say nothing of the Romans, authors of principles of justice which are valid today, yet who practiced human sacrifice until the first century of the Christian era. In consequence, one cannot label the Indian as cultures of cruelty; it would mean an absurd application of an alien contemporary viewpoint to ancient social set-ups that functioned in terms of their own values.

The old mythology is still alive in the mind of the Indians; it is the field of their inner life, the best shelter for their secular past. Unfortunately the natives do not possess a written language and have been unable to evolve their literary traditions. But the white man is fully conscious of this mythical background. No one dares doubt that the power and genuine quality of the artistic productions of the contemporary Iberian-American countries are chiefly due to the old leavens of this New World. For in the long run what is a white man in the Iberian Americas? Still complex, he is the result of two races whose essential values are gradually becoming integrated and are driving him steadily closer to their punctual and definite expression.

# The Heritage of Myth in Literature

*by Hermann Broch*



**H**ISTORIOGRAPHY, biography and the historical novel all descend from the same ancestor: the heroic epic. Yet behind this ancestor looms one that is even more distant, more venerable—the original ancestor of all recorded human communication: myth. And it seems as though historiography, biography and the historical novel today still owe their validity to this mythical inheritance, however attenuated it may have become in the long succession of time.

For in myth the fundamentals of the soul are revealed to itself; it sees them again in the happenings of the world and of nature and brings them into action. In a parallel process, the mind understands its fundamentals to be the principles of logic; this logic it sees again in the outside world in the chain of cause and effect, and is thus enabled to master it. Such is the dual basis upon which man proceeds to grasp and order the world. *Mythos* and *logos* are the two archetypes of content and form, and they mirror one another and are miraculously united in that most human of all human phenomena: language. Jung's term "archetype" is probably nowhere more apposite than in the case of mythos and logos, which in their interrelationship constitute the essence of man's being.

Born of his fundamental structure, myth and logos represent to man timelessness as such. They preserve the continuity of endeavour down the generations by making all achievements in the field of art and of action comprehensible or at least translatable to each new generation. Myth and logos attest to the unity of the human race as it stretches across the centuries, to the timelessness

of each achievement, and man is thus enabled to divine also the timelessness of the self—that sense of a certainty beyond time which moved Kant to speak of “the starry sky above me and the moral law within me.”

It is this knowledge, rooted in myth, of timelessness that is the moving spirit in every genuine historical work—the historian’s as well as the novelist’s—and which enables and indeed compels both to turn toward the past so as to lift it into the present, into an everlasting present.

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Myth, in its union with logos, comprises the totality of human existence. To achieve the reflection and substantiation of man’s being, it is bound to tend toward a totality, a conception implying an order so all-embracing that it becomes a cosmogony, a “creation.” All myth culminates in cosmogony. It is the prototype of the expressible; it is primitive, yet of an inimitable simplicity. None of the mythical derivatives originating in later epochs of mankind, whether scholarly historical research, or historiography with its varieties—biographical and otherwise—or historical fiction has ever been or can ever become cosmogony. And yet, owing to their mythical heritage, they all aspire to a totality of a cosmogonic kind so as to become genuine creation.

True historiography is by its very method beholden to the myth. For, despite its dependence on the logos and even on the logical expression present in every mythic event, historical knowledge is only to be obtained by the mythic projection of the soul and its structure, by the projection of the mind into events. This is the only way to divide and organize the anonymous stream of events into those historic units whose synthesis evokes the total picture of history. It makes no difference whether we contemplate the history of an epoch or of a nation, the economic history within an epoch or within a nation, the history of a city, of a language or of an art or science. Likewise it does not matter what aspect we choose, and whether our study be special or general; each of these “historical units” is conceived as a form developed by its intrinsic specific “spirit.” It is as if some mythical “spirit” of that

particular epoch, nation, language, economy, art, and finally of mankind, had created all the accomplishments and values which make up each specific historical unit. We find, then, always a projected mythical "creator of value" involved; Hegel's "spirit" may easily be included in this category. Even where, as in biography, this creative subject becomes "concrete," "abstract" projection cannot be eliminated; historical knowledge starts out with the establishment of premises. Documentary evidence thus becomes a series of value judgments made by an abstract or concrete "*author* of values." The result is a picture of history as a logical result of causes and effects, a picture which receives its unity from some projected mythical center of values.

On one level, the historical novel is also bound to comply with these historical precepts. It is tied to the particular segment of history which forms its "scene," and it is its function to make this segment appear as a unified whole. But on another level it has a different specific task: for literature, and indeed all art, represents the total reality of a part of the world. To simplify: the lyrical work of art embodies the totality of a moment; the dramatic, that of a conflict of character; the short story, the totality of a situation; the novel, the totality of a human life. The novel is by no means simply an invented biography. Biography, being part of the realm of history, is exclusively concerned with the aspirations of its hero, with the successes and defeats its hero experiences in the course of his efforts to realize his values. Whereas the novel projects the totality not only of the spirit, but of life. Accordingly, it must throw light on the whole dark anonymous realm in which every human life, with all its aspirations, is steeped, and which no historical fact can ever describe. This is the origin of all the well-known experiments in the novel which attempt to arrest the whole anonymous stream of life, experiments which are psychologically as well as technically inconclusive, for life—let alone its description in a novel—cannot be resolved into a sequence of seconds. At the same time they are lyrical experiments, for the grasping of the anonymous moment of life involves also the grasping of its totality. And they are very

promising experiments, insofar as they succeed in developing that capacity for selection, for choice of the proper seconds, which is essential to integration, and to every work of art. The lyric expresses the awakening of the soul, the mystic alarm which summons the soul to open its eyes and seize in one quick glance the whole of existence in one timeless moment, as it were.

Language, which was probably born with the first outcry, would not be language, i.e., the union of *logos* and *mythos*, had that language-creating outcry not been a lyrical and hence human expression—already germinally containing the entire system of the mythical and the logical. This is one of the reasons, perhaps the principal one, why every attempt to present the totality of experience through language must be shot through with poetry. Any historian who wishes to produce more than a mere textbook, who wishes to present genuine historical insight, must be something of a writer, a poet. And so it is not surprising that historiography gave rise to the historical novel, which is history's complement and perhaps a last attempt to recover the myth.

History is bound not only to lift the past into the present, but also to plunge the present into the past so as to transform it magically into past future. Only through the union of past and future is that continuous present created for which the soul longs and into which it desires to enter. This present, a continuum of past, present and future, is timeless and therefore the soul finds rest in it.

The representation of timelessness in time is the aim of the historical novel. We find an example in Thomas Mann, in the scene where the aged Eleazar serves Abraham, and yet, about a century later, guides young Joseph through infancy. Or where Jacob predicts to his sons the future of their tribes as if it had happened long ago. In this continuity and simultaneity of time and space, meaning can almost dispense with language, for the beginning and end of each sequence coincide, yet without destroying the sequence. Time, though not expressly denied, turns insensibly into space, into that dark pythagorean time-space which dwells in the mutest nowhere of dreams, and the existence of which

nevertheless becomes clearly perceptible in music. Only in dream, in dream-shadowed darkness and dream-illuminated light, determined equally by the mythos and logos of dream, is the soul able to penetrate this realm of being, that yet is so intimately its own. Even then it rarely advances beyond the anteroom. Where such poetic expression is successful (both shadowy and precise as dream itself) poetry knows itself to be identical with the soul. Both are aware of having entered the realm of prophecy in a dreamlike knowledge spreading over past and future and uniting the twofold Once for ever into an everlasting Now. No better or more beautiful example of this sort of poetry exists than the introduction to the first volume of the Joseph novels.

Dream, that diurnal and nocturnal myth, harbors not only the ordinary (Aristotelian) "day-logic" but also a more comprehensive "night-logic." Although "night-logic," with its lightning associations and distinctions, seems illogical, we can yet sense its deep meaning and know for certain that it follows definite if almost transcendental rules. Insofar as dream can be subsumed under day-logic it is—thanks to Freud's rules which are, however, chiefly concerned with its contents (types of symbols, determinants, etc.)—more or less accessible. Yet the mechanism of night-logic is inaccessible to direct empirical study, and would, if at all, become accessible only if it could be demonstrated that a "meta-Aristotelian," logical-mathematical model could be found to agree with the dream-functions. Modern logic is about to construct such models, but for its own purposes, not for the purposes of psychology. If it should ever succeed in laying down the principles of such a purely formal dream-logic, this logic would also include the formal pattern for every type of "creative" thinking—that thrust into the future peculiar to man, which makes the future a part of the present. All this, particularly cognition pushing forward towards the "new" with its heuristic question, leaves Aristotelian logic far behind. The new logic has its seat in the sphere of "intuitions," in which all that is new originates. In the widest sense the exact formulation of these problems would amount to a "theory of prophecy."

Therefore, history has been defined quite correctly as inverse prophecy. The same may be said, with even greater justice, of the historical novel. Creative imagination depends, more than any other intellectual activity, on dreamlike prophetic intuition; in fact, it is itself a form of prophecy. At all times the singer and the seer were considered brothers. Nowhere does this become more evident than where poetry turns in its quest for the "new" into the past.

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Prophecy springs from the knowledge of human existence, from that which is the most human in man: his awareness of infinity. Myth and logos are prophetically united in our presentiment of infinity, and together they thrust forward into the unknown. But they separate again, since cognition can never wholly master the infinite. They have separated again so thoroughly that prophetic knowledge seems to be completely expunged from the consciousness of modern man. Of the two branches of prophecy, the one which might be termed "logical prophecy" (because it takes the form of logical-causal questioning and induction, the form of logical-causal science and its time-conquering laws) is considered by modern man as a natural and simple experience of daily life, in which he is unable to see any prophetic quality. Of the other branch, that of "mythical prophecy," he knows nothing at all. He either tends to confuse this branch with its degenerate late form, superstitious fortune-telling, or, disregarding its epic and Biblical descent, relegates it to a region of fable where nothing is natural but the miracle—in which, however, he no longer believes. For modern man, like his ancestors, greatly prefers superstition to knowledge, and would rather follow false prophets than listen to the voice of genuine prophecy. Whether it be myth or logos, man recoils from their sound of infinity and is unwilling to admit that what he hears is the sound of his own thinking and feeling. He fears this sound and is bound to dread it, for it is also the sound of his own loneliness, which continues unendingly. He finds no surcease in the echo of infinity which, in myth-

ical or logical insight, unites our existence with that of the universe.

"Mythical prophecy" was a moral phenomenon. Aware of the nature of the human soul, of its petty timidity and dullness, it served as a moral awakening to infinity. It was a moral warning and prediction of approaching disaster. "Logical prophecy," in its modern scientific form, shows as yet little kinship with this moral responsibility, although it may eventually be called upon to accept it. Such a summons, however, cannot be laid on science artificially from the outside. Instead it will have to be a natural product of science's inner growth, i.e., of a deepening research into its fundamental premises. Only in this way may we expect a clarification of the relationship between various interdependent functions of the soul: the logical, the spiritual and, finally, the ethical. At present such an inquiry would certainly be regarded with distrust by most scientists.

On the other hand, there are increasing signs that the writers are taking up this problem. The creative imagination, closely akin to prophecy, endeavours to duplicate the latter's moral concern with the future within its own sphere. It is precisely because the "spirit" of our epoch is materialistic, the very negation of anything spiritual, that the creative imagination (to fulfill its mission of representing the world as whole) has been compelled to sound an ethical warning. This warning, however, can no longer be uttered in the guise of mythic prophecy. In spite of its kinship with myth, the creative imagination also partakes of the spirit of the epoch, and must yield to it, if it is to develop into the logical prophecy of the future. It will achieve this by becoming poly-historic. The desire for totality, which has always driven poetry into the arms of history, leads it nowadays to poly-historic knowledge. From there poetry gathers new momentum for the push forward into the uninvestigated, into the yet unprobed territory of ethical and prophetic mandates.

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The historical novel served originally utopian and later romantic aims. Its historical garb was for the most part mere decoration

or orchestration, although the choice of such masquerade was doubtless determined by notions of timelessness and prophecy. Yet the purposes of entertainment and instruction prevailed.

The mythical, and at the same time prophetic, element made its first appearance in the modern novel in the work of Dostoyevsky, although his writings dealt ostensibly with contemporary mores. Not until the twentieth century did this mythical element develop fully. The apocalyptic presentiment, already present in Dostoyevsky, of a universal collapse of values requiring a complete reconstruction of the human world—in short, a new creation—attained world dominion only after the nightmarish events of the twentieth century. It was reserved for the twentieth century writer to realize, first, that the telling of instructive or diverting tales cannot create a totality strong enough to balance the totality of the universe; second, that if he fell short of this supreme goal his work would be naught. What had been permitted the naturalists from Balzac to Zola, and even beyond the latter—the holding of a balance between work and world through description of a whole—has become impossible. An exploding world can no longer be portrayed, but, since its destruction issues from the deepest roots of human nature, it is human nature itself which must be shown in its naked reality, in its greatness as well as its misery. By so doing, the writer already approaches the grandeur of myth.

Yet such a task requires far more than simply to sketch mythical man—hero, prophet, seer,—superficially, in a naturalistic manner. Something more is necessary; subject-matter alone cannot accomplish it. Joyce grappled with the problem in two stages. In *Ulysses* he stretched the ancient myth over the entire field of history and hence of human life. But, despite inner monologues and symbolic structure, the means employed were external. The second time, in *Finnegans Wake*, he penetrated into the dream-world, which is the true birthplace of myth. Thomas Mann, closer to tradition than Joyce, and hence still intent on instruction and entertainment—though with an ironic twist—takes up the temporal aspect of myth, i.e. the problem of the everlasting pres-

ent. By interweaving the present with human events he achieves not only simultaneity in the purely artistic sense, but also timeless prophecy in such strength that the work in which this occurs is itself raised into the timeless. It is basically a mythical, yet at the same time a logical prophecy for—like Joyce's—it has sprung from poly-historic ground.

But out of the poly-historic develops also the cosmopolitan. The curious phenomenon of so-called national literature, first in its epic, later in its predominately dramatic form (the historical orientation of these forms clearly shows their mythic-prophetic origin, for the prophet's wisdom had most certainly tribal roots) indicates that at the beginning of every new cultural period myth had stood godfather. Despite his Christianity, Dante was still a national poet, and the dramatists of the Renaissance were even more so; but the myth of the present day will prove to be supranational.

Certainly the mythic novel of today, whose birth we have just witnessed, will not be the last word. The myth of the new culture will, perhaps—indeed, probably—choose a form quite different from that of the novel. Maybe it will find an adequate expression in the industrialized film or through some other medium. But the fact that literature has made the first attempts at such expression may be interpreted as a hopeful announcement of the new culture of all mankind that will have to come.

# Three Greek Myths in Palladian Perspective

by Marguerite Yourcenar



“Je vois déjà la rame et la barque fatale;  
J’entends le vieux nocher de la rive infernale.  
Impatient, il crie: ‘On t’attend ici-bas;  
Tout est prêt, viens, descends, ne me retarde pas.’”

**S**HORTLY before a weary Racine was to abandon the theatre (whether from religious conviction, disgust of his long liaison, or mere fatigue), to enter the ranks of the bourgeois and write no more, he had begun an *Alceste*. Only these four verses remain, a fragment as pure as the *Ariane* of Monteverde, but even more truncated. In treating this very old legend the poet would have gone from the theme of incestuous love in *Phèdre* to the tender subject of conjugal love and sacrifice, just as in his own life he was about to pass from the world of actresses to that of happy domesticity.

Of all the lovers created by Racine only one is a wife, Andromaque, and she is a widow, her beloved one a shade. Her passion, therefore, is shadowed by the same sad splendour as that of Bérénice, who loves a man who dares not return her love; or of Eriphile, in the *Iphigenia*, who loves a man who cares nothing for her. In *Alceste* Racine would have portrayed a woman overcome by the very fulfillment of her love, suffering death as the final act of its consummation. Her sacrifice was greater than the filial act of Iphigenia, which, though nobly undertaken, was not volun-

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NOTE: This essay is the second part of a long preface to three new plays on classical themes, *Le Mystère d'Alceste*, *Intermède d'Ariane*, *Electre ou la Chute des Masques*, and is a discussion of these themes as handed down to us by various traditions, and as treated by the present writer. The remainder of this essay will appear in the Summer issue.

tary; Alcestis, indeed, would have foreshadowed Racine's Esther, the Greek saint immolating herself for the most lawful of human passions leading the way to the Jewish saint who sacrificed herself for her people, and for the eventual birth of the Messiah.

What would have been the result had this theme of Euripides been played to the end on the pure instrument of Racine? By what exquisite means would the French poet have reconciled the satiric element of the Greek's tragi-comedy with the absolute monism of his own tragic universe? What psychological mechanisms would have been supplied in place of the *deus ex machina* to accomplish the salvation of his heroine, as in *Iphigenia*, by purely human devices (if anything could be purely human in his world, governed as it was by the Christian doctrine of Grace?). These are things we shall never know. We know only, and thanks to this fragment, that somewhere in the realm of Ideas the ghost of a very perfect Alcestis exists eternally.

Chaucer makes of this heroine the noble lady of a May-Day procession, the gracious queen of all good women, a figure of medieval tapestry, which is, after all, not so very different from a figure of Greek vase-painting. The Middle Ages seem to go back beyond the Hellenistic pathos of Euripides to take up the tradition at its source, the sacred succession of old wives' tales. In the popular myths of ancient Thessaly Alcestis would probably have appeared, as in *The Legend of Good Women*, in the simple and traditional aspect of fair princess and virtuous wife. For the translator of the *Romance of the Rose*, who inherits an earlier theory of love as handed down through medieval scholasticism, Alcestis was above all the example of perfect love. In this respect the courtly Middle Ages are more Greek than is usually conceded, and not so far from Plato, who spurns the whining Orpheus of legend, but places Alcestis highest in the rank of human loves, a strong-hearted woman, fully the equal of masculine lovers.

"Methought I saw my late espoused saint  
Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave . . ."

With the sure insight of the mystic, Milton goes straight to the heart of the miracle: he understands the role of Alcestis as

clearly as he grasps the function of Eve. Racine would have made of *Alcestis* an admirable concerto for violin; Milton begins an organ phrase. This last great syncretic poet of the Renaissance quite naturally identified the beloved wife who died in childbirth with the Greek Alcestis, womanly symbol of the Resurrection.

Gluck has twice treated the subject of lovers separated by death. Of the two operas, it is evident that the pastoral tale of Orpheus and Eurydice would appeal more to the pre-romantic Germany of his time than the story of Alcestis, as handed down to him through baroque tradition and already heavily encrusted with the monarchic splendour of the eighteenth century. That there was something more, however, in his portrayal of a regal Alcestis than mere theatrical pomp is clear to us now from the way that his century came to its tragic end, when once more the public square saw princesses offered as victims and queens led to the scaffold. The young Marie Antoinette had been Gluck's pupil in Vienna; she defended him against Paris, which derided him as it was later to deride Wagner. Because of this connection between the ill-fated queen and her former master we are now tempted to hear in the more somber strains of his *Alcestis* a prophetic requiem for the dynastic victim whom the Count of Fersen, in the role of Hercules, the liberator, was helpless to save.

The respect of a middle-class Gluck, as of a middle-class Goethe, for court life gives him a feeling for the Olympian heights of mythology, since it is merely a question of imagining for both categories a race of beings exempt from the problems of ordinary life, creatures noble and stately, moving in the ceremonial setting which best befits classical tragedy. What mysticism there is in the drama of *Alcestis* for the eighteenth century lies in this idealization of man, and not in the primitive magic of the combat with death, nor in the semi-Christian myth of religious immolation. And, in this world of musicians, let us not forget the *Alcestis* of Lully with its stately aria for Charon, wherein Death, the Grand Monarch, strikes with oars of bronze the waters of the grand canals of Versailles.

Alfieri was a Greek scholar, but his aristocratic liberalism, typical of the era of enlightenment, does not assort with full understanding of myth in general; all that he hands down to us is a purely baroque version of *Alcestis*, baroque of that special kind, characteristically Italian, in which the almost abnormal swelling of the muscles is visible under the smoothest of marble surfaces, his characters forming an intricate group, solid, cold, gleaming, and incredibly abstract in its sensuous appeal, the kind of thing that Bernini would have attempted for an *Alcestis* in sculpture.

If these are the poets and musicians who drew inspiration from the play of Euripides, what then is he, its creator? First, he is himself an interpreter. He stands in relation to ancestral tradition in the position that Alfieri and Racine are to him. Even where we lack sources to prove the point, we know that he is remodelling, perfecting, or distorting according to his highly individual taste texts long accepted as holy, even if trite. Midway between Aeschylus and Lucian, he does not sit like Aeschylus, at the door of the temple, interpreter of oracles; nor does he belong, like Sophocles, to those halcyon days of antiquity wherein there is perfect interchange between myth and man's understanding, between the weight of man's destiny and the power of his gods. Neither is he like Lucian a witty cynic. Both skeptic and mystic, irritated by dogma and nevertheless drawn toward the invisible world, too individualistic to be confined by a religion but singularly attracted to all religious ardours, a man much more complex than his predecessors, but less substantial also, his drifting spirit was destined to be a ready target for Aristophanes' jests.

The poet has only two possible positions in relation to each of the passions of man: he can amplify them, exalt them, free them of all complications and coverings, and convert them to solid marble, impersonal as the body of man raised to the height of a pure ideal; or he can recall to earth this celestial symbol of his own creation, breathe life into this statue which he has helped to carve, dissolve the pure crystal which he has formed from a thousand tears. It is as though the poet, alternately fearing to

have gone too far in each direction, were striving sometimes to prove to man that he is eternal, and sometimes to prove to eternity that it is made of human stuff. These two movements succeed each other throughout literary history, like the alternate and inevitable movements of breathing. With Euripides begins the period of *expiration* for Greek myth. He takes each tragic theme cross-grain, or inside out; his public of scandalized greybeards and young enthusiasts discover that these thrice holy myths are translatable into the least dignified events of everyday life. Phædra, mythical sister of the Minotaur, becomes a passionate, restless young woman, somewhat hard, strong as flame itself—a Greek woman of any period. Orestes pursued by the Furies is an epileptic in state of seizure upon the stage; the almost religious love which binds brother to sister is transformed into a tender intimacy between invalid and nurse, the fragile young boy and the stronger young woman. Clytemnestra is a devoted mother who worries over the confinement of her daughter, the homicidal maniac; Helen is really a chaste wife.

There is in him a touch of Laforgue, with that rather exasperating quality which a Laforgue always has, a mind which busies itself over topics already near the point of corruption. There is in him something, too, of Barrès: the same mixture of dryness, clarity, and suffocating ardour which confines Bérénice in the marshy regions of Aigues Mortes, and drives Léopold and Thérèse into the religious orgies of the Bacchantes; the same contrast between a sensibility quickly surfeited and an intelligence which is insatiable; the same love of expiring grace and sinuous charm; the same delight in that exoticism which singles out the Astinés of the Caucasus and the Medeas of Colchis. And finally, he has in him something of a Dostoievsky. This fourth-century Greek is the first to expose, under the firm Doric muscles, the complicated network of the Slavic nervous system. His grotesque Hercules, both glutton and ribald, in whom a superhuman strength and power suddenly becomes manifest, is a distant prototype of the clowns of *The Idiot* and *The Possessed*, who are subject to divine visitation. Phædra and Stenobia are as close kin to Anna

Karenina as to Antigone. The elusive and tender intimacy between man and gods in Euripides already approaches the golden mysticism of Byzantium. The Apollo at the crossroads which Cassandra, in Aeschylus, evokes in her agony is still a cylindrical idol, a block of divine substance; half-miracle, half-dream, the Artemis who hovers over the dying Hippolytus is less an idol than a phantom, the holy apparition which brings consolation to the martyr.

But a poet is not defined by insisting solely upon his affinity with the past, or with the future. The Bacchantes of Euripides foreshadow the Magdalenes of Calvary, but each of these two phenomena of tears and ecstasy would cease to be unique if their differences did not outweigh their resemblances. Euripides belongs to a very sharply defined period of the Greek world, to that afternoon hour when shadows are already lengthening, but when daylight is still suspended between heaven and earth, a shade of melancholy underlying the serenity. Under the magic of this Eleusinian glow the veiled Alcestis comes back from the grave, and the bleeding Hippolytus descends gently to Hades. Death and life are indistinguishable, interchangeable, identical as morning and evening star. The late plays of Shakespeare come to mind, wherein reigns the same atmosphere of golden dusk, and the dead are miraculously restored, and statues become women again.

Greek sensibility has continued in Euripides' vein, in its mixture of the barren and the voluptuous. His tendency to transform ancient sacred tragedy into pleasing melodrama makes of the classic chorus a forerunner of the popular songs of the modern Ionian Islands, resembling Venetian or Neapolitan airs in their excessive languor; but where his quality of tragic poet prevails over his flair for the theatrical his sad strain is like the unforgettable minor threnody of the Aegean Isles, the cry of a bird stricken to the heart.

It is always easy to read into a text more than the author intended to put there; it is probably not possible to find in it more than the author actually put, for our most daring hypotheses can

do no more than combine the different elements which are present within the work, elements which the poet himself included there without analyzing them, or in analyzing them only under other forms. We shall never know whether Euripides realized that his drama of death and redemption revolves not only about the problem of conjugal love, but about charity which is the essence of love. *Alcestis* is constructed like a fugue built on a succession of sacrifices: Alcestis sacrifices her life for the man she loves; Admetus sacrifices his ritual of mourning for those tributes of hospitality which are for the pre-Christian world the most direct expression of loving one's neighbor as one's self; Hercules sacrifices his grosser pleasures for the salvation of an unknown woman; and the only despicable character in the play, the father, is so low simply because he makes no sacrifice. Nevertheless, Euripides, with that impartiality which distinguishes the dramatic poet from the satirist, makes us feel that the old man's refusal to sacrifice himself originates in a passion for life which is not less essential for an orderly universe than the selfless devotion of philanthropists and voluntary victims. From this narrow but deep-rooted basis, this hard rock of personality which is determined not to die, to the last white fluttering of the death of the swan Alcestis, we pass through every degree of devotion.

The modern poet who plans an *Alcestis* is obliged to analyze this very simple but mysterious legend, whereas the Greek poet could keep to the synthesis of a dogma still current. We are inclined to forget that at the time this piece was first played the god Apollo was still worshipped. His presence on the stage, like the presence of Christ in a medieval mystery play, was all that was needed to make the audience take a religious attitude, that is to say a serious attitude, toward the drama. Likewise, the winged and bearded Thanatos was still for the fourth-century Athenian on the border land between religious dogma and popular superstition, between personal phantasmagoria and literary metaphor. In our time the figure of Death, armed with hour-glass and scythe, has become a theatrical ornamentation for catafalques and for clocks; we must go to the most gruesome ghost

stories to recapture that shiver of horror which the image of Death, a Vampire prowling in cemeteries, appeased only by offerings of blood, still gave to the ancient Greeks.

On the other hand, even now in times of mass slaughter and industrialized warfare, death itself has become for the most thoughtful of us an individual adventure, a metamorphosis and a disintegration even more complete than decomposition in the tomb or crumbling to ashes; and it is this meditation of the philosopher facing the end of self, this slow descent toward nothingness, that the modern poet has to portray, where Euripides had only to call to mind the fight between Thanatos and Hercules. A contemporary play on *Alcestis* must make clear, also, in this single miraculous story, both the commonplace and the mysterious circumstances of the last hours of life, showing that the drama of Hercules' struggle, or Admetus' resignation, takes place at the bedside of every beloved one.

For Euripides the interest of this ancient tale, so permeated with religious significance, lay in reducing it for the first time to a purely human level, and he therefore tends to put almost aggressive argumentation into the scene between Admetus and his father, where the conflict between the two generations is set forth with a nakedness which must once have seemed scandalous. For a contemporary playwright, on the contrary, the same conflict loses its novelty after two centuries of realistic treatment of family quarrels, and tends now to subordinate itself to the tragicomic approach of a Maupassant, a simple sketch of an old man and woman afraid for their skins.

While the exact measurement of relationships between man and his destiny is calculated with incomparable subtlety by the Greek poet, his presentation of the marital relationship is of an almost schematic simplicity, richer in implication than in development. However unduly interested in the psychology of love Euripides may have appeared to his contemporaries, to later generations he seems, as in the case of all innovators, not to have gone very far into his subject. Classic restraint is undoubtedly a factor contributing to this limitation, but we are apt to won-

der whether or not the very existence of the more complicated relationships in marriage was not subordinated by the lack of accepted channels for expressing them. Passionate conflicts between husband and wife lacked the powerful support of literary precedent in the Greek world, though our century has behind it a long tradition for the anatomy of love.

A twentieth-century treatment of *Alcestis* can logically present a group of three characters, a variation on the eternal triangle, here composed of husband, wife, and rescuer, a three-dimensional group as complicated in its combination of realism and lyricism as an Alexandrine marble, a Laocoön or a Niobe. But this central sculpture is surrounded by characters of only two dimensions, rough and traditional silhouettes which make up both the comic and the nightmarish aspects of the work. From a certain point of view, this *Alcestis* can be considered as a tragedy invaded by a perpetual ballet of Molière's *Facheux*, nuisances intruding upon the romantic reverie of Admetus' mourning. These grotesque equivalents of a satiric chorus, made up of the mayor, the neighbors, the selfish old parents, the undertaker, are here the representatives of that social and ritualistic mechanism from which there is no escape for the living or the dead. On the stage they could wear masques; but we must see in Admetus, Alcestis, and Hercules every feature of the human drama.

At the other extremity of this tragic stage, the gods themselves wear the masques of darkness or of light; they are Death and the Sun, who are not so much characters in the drama as forces underlying it. The Nurse is a more special case. She is a human figure, but is also the generalization and condensation of all those nurses who have enriched Greek drama from their simple wisdom and their life-time devotion. She alone takes the part of the tragic chorus. More important still, she belongs on the side of the gods, and is aged as the Fates, whose dour masque she could easily wear. Many a nursemaid and cook has played such a role on the household stage, and this character comes partly out of our childhood memories, and partly out of the Nurse of *Hippolytus* or of the *Choephoraë*, rather than from Euripides' colorless ser-

vant in *Alcestis*. Racine would have had no use for her, disdaining as he did the instinctive wisdom of simple folk.

Supposing all these problems resolved, or at least stated, in the play, the principal stumbling block is still to be reckoned with, namely, the moral worthlessness of the weak Admetus, for whom Alcestis gives her life. Racine would probably have avoided the difficulty by presenting Admetus as one of his many young princes, sensitive, brooding, who were supposedly too closely modelled upon the young lords of Versailles, but who are actually more like the inbred Greek aristocracy of the Near East than the hearty nobility of the court of Louis XIV. However the character of Admetus is handled, the poet himself will be the wiser if he accepts, as a fact of life, that a woman can sacrifice herself for a worthless man.

(Translated from the French by MARGUERITE YOURCENAR and  
GRACE FRICK)

# Myths for Materialists

*by Jacques Barzun*



## I

THE ANGLO-AMERICANS of the twentieth century complained that they had no myths. Their poets, critics and scholars kept bewailing this supposed lack and some even tried to supply it by artificial drafts upon the Irish, Greek or Oriental mythologies. Modern investigation, however, points to the familiar truth that the men of that restless culture were calling for something they already had. Myth, in fact, so pervaded their lives that they could not see it for what it was.

The proof of this statement rests chiefly on the finds recently made in a great hollow formed below the Manhattan schist, probably during the Big (or subatomic) Depression of 1999. Under the usual pile of rubbish in this vast and naturally airtight enclosure, excavation has revealed a group of small buildings, with some adjoining structures shortly to be described; and within the best preserved of these buildings, a large room virtually undamaged. This room may have been the library of a club, or alternatively—for the indications are ambiguous—a dentist's waiting room. In either event, the discovery remains the most significant since that of the lost continent itself. For although the books add little or nothing to our knowledge, the large mass of magazines dating from the middle years of the century constitutes a unique, illuminating, and priceless collection.

I hasten to add that in putting this high value upon it, I have in mind not the reading matter which presumably satisfied the contemporary readers, but the much greater bulk of pictorial rep-

resentations, often accompanied by text, which resemble earlier fragments identified by the symbol ADVT. Scholars have disputed at length over the exact meaning of this device. I can now, I believe, settle the principal doubts and establish—or at least confidently advance—a fairly complete theory of the subject. Those pictures, that text, enshrine the mythology of the twentieth century. After examining and comparing some seven thousand pieces, I am in a position to sketch in broad strokes the religious thoughts and the moral feelings evoked by that body of myths.<sup>1</sup>

I may at once explain that I draw my assurance from the curious structures which I referred to as adjoining the buildings recently found. Collapsed though these structures now are, it is clear that they were once meant to stand upright as panels of great size, occupying open spaces set apart to afford the widest visibility. All this suggests a religious consecration of both the site and the structure. On the face of these panels (often marked Outdoor Advt) were the same colored images as in the periodicals, but of heroic proportions and usually accompanied by some pithy aphorism. The number of such dedicated placards in a relatively small area like the one examined justifies my belief that we have in these words and pictures literally the revealed religion of the twentieth century.

It is normal in any culture for the commonest beliefs to be tacit and for the meaning of symbols to be so obvious as never to give rise to any glossary. From the outset, then, we face the double enigma of those four letters ADVT. What was their ordinary meaning and what their ultimate significance? The three main hypotheses regarding the first question are that the mark stands for (1) Advertising, (2) Advantage, and (3) Adventitious. Not the least startling conclusion I have come to is that the symbol denotes all three ideas. There is no discrepancy among them, even though historically the first meaning was the most usual. In twentieth century usage, "advertise" was a verb derived from the character of the Bitch-Goddess of Appearance, whose sacred name is now lost. The four letters stood for some-

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<sup>1</sup> More exactly, that *mytho-pinaco-prosopopoeia*.

thing like "Behold Me"—whence the plausible but false etymology of "advert eyes."

Without at first suspecting it, we touch here the central dogma in the Anglo-Americans' religious system. What they called their "modern" civilization was built on the preponderance of one physical sense over all the others, the sense of sight. Their science was not, as with us, the whole of knowledge, but only such knowledge as could be brought within range of the eye, directly or through instruments. They believed only in what they could measure, that is, what they could lay along a ruler, or between two hairlines, or could otherwise visually place. No competent student of their age can deny that they displayed extraordinary ingenuity in achieving this universal reduction of Being to the grasp of a single faculty.

But this monomania entailed an ascetic drying up of the inner life in every member of the culture. It was a prodigal expense of spirit for which ordinary life had to supply emotional compensation. Hence the need for, and the slow creation of, the vast mythology known as Advertising. An "ad"—as it came to be called in demotic speech—was simply the power of things made into pictures. Through the eye was given what actual life denied—beauty, strength, leisure, love, and personal distinction.

"Objects," as one contemporary philosopher confessed, "change their usual faces with the myth maker's emotions."<sup>2</sup> How much did he know of the origin and results of this transformation in the familiar things about him? We cannot tell, but in his day mind control through icons was well-nigh omnipotent. For example, by collating scattered references in the ancient literature with the newly found "ads," it is clear that just at the moment when the myth makers began to invoke the supernatural power of citrus to sustain and embellish existence, technological improvements were depriving the fruit of its natural color, taste and chance of ripening. At the very time when the sense of life as a whole was being atomized into a series of "processes," the mythology was verbally making up for the deficiency by a poetical

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<sup>2</sup> Cassirer

iteration having Life as its theme. "Vital" became a magic word, as for example in an ad referring to the various kinds of popcorn eaten at breakfast: "Be sure you get the *vital* outer covering of wheat."

About the same period also, the mysterious substances called Vitamins—precious if measured by cost and complex if judged by their name—became the object of an official cult created jointly by mythologers and medicine men. To carry out the myth, Vitamins were chosen by symbolic letters and were weighed in thousands of "life-giving units." A last example will show how unremitting was this grasping after a runaway sense of well-being. Ten, twenty, thirty times a day, the Anglo-Americans were reminded of their need for vigor, for youth, for a "lift" by drug or weed—the worship of Pep. Initiated by one of the national heroes, Ponce de Leon, this quest was originally for a fountain in the south (*soda-fountain*). Many claimed to have found it and "advertised" to that effect; bottled drinks and packaged foods bore the magic syllable. "To be full of Pep" was equivalent to our "enthusiastic" or possessed by the god—the rare state then known in full as *pepsicola*.

## II

We must now turn from the concept to the embodiment, the pictures. What strikes the unprejudiced observer at once is the overwhelming emphasis on womanhood—presumably as the inexhaustible fount of human life—and on the situation of sexual approach as the characteristic moment in that life. If one did not know the ways of myth makers, their habit of juxtaposing incompatibles for the sake of a higher truth, one would suppose that the Anglo-Americans were unable to do anything without a member of the opposite sex in a state of provocative or compliant amorousness. In their iconography, seductiveness and sheeps' eyes invariably accompany eating, working, and riding, securing food, clothing, and shelter, listening to music or averting constipation.

An important corollary was that suggestive effects of nudity and drapery were limited, perhaps by law, to the portrayal of

women. In all the seven thousand documents examined there occurs not a single instance of Father Paul's Pills showing him in tights, nor of the Chesterfield girl wearing a cassock. Despite this rigid esthetic, based on the complementary traits of the sexes as regards display, all objects whatever acquired an erotic component. The motive is clear enough: the artificial search for life through objects can only be kept at high pitch by associating the objects themselves with the strongest of desires. Advertising maxims were explicit enough: "Look sweeter in a sweater," "Use the soap with sex appeal," etc.

This mythopoeic principle did not, however, rely solely on the mating instinct. It employed two others, closely related—vanity and devotion to the Mother. This last, which goes back very far in the western tradition, was in its latest form singularly debased. Though I am certain that the best literary and pictorial talent of America went into this highly revered and highly paid art of mythography, all the efforts of these creative artists did not succeed in making *The Mothers* interesting. The type remained domestic and sentimental. One has only to think of the earlier school of Madonna makers, or of the medieval poet von Goethe-Faust, to see the difference.

The decline may well have been due to some obscure physical cause: the American myth-mother is always depicted as frail, grey-haired, with glasses and a senile rictus. Yet by a strange contradiction, the American maiden or young matron is almost always represented as nature makes her during the months of lactation. This is an improbability—or a religious mystery—which I do not pretend to have fathomed.

Contrary to the feeling of all mankind about ancestors, the second appeal, directed at personal vanity, occupies a much larger place than mother worship. Yet the anomaly disappears when we understand the democratic paradox of competition within equality: everyone has a mother; not everyone has a Packard.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, mass production tended to make any class of objects (as of men) virtually identical; some kind of mythical individuality

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<sup>3</sup> Highly upholstered locomotive.

had to be imparted to them in hopes of its transfer to the mass man. More and more, the social self came to depend on the constant tonic of acquiring these specially wrapped goods, these "superheterogene" articles.

I cannot agree with a famous critic of that epoch, Veblen, who spoke of "conspicuous consumption" and attendant waste as the mainspring of "modern" behavior. He described, it seems to me, an earlier age, that of kings and nobles, who translated power into munificence. The common man, on the contrary, receives direct satisfaction from objects, and for the reason I gave earlier: that the goddess ADVT consecrates matter by guaranteeing (1) secret worth and (2) miraculous origin. This is in keeping with all we know about myth. The medicine man infuses the magic into the familiar thing; whence the American advertising formulas, "A Wonderful Buy" and "It's Different," i.e., supernatural. A fuller text of the best period informs us, over a beguiling triptych, "Not just a fur coat, but an important aid to gracious living. It will give your morale a lift, *as well as impress your friends.*" (Italics mine.) No distinction between direct and indirect help to self-esteem could be clearer, and as it happens, the distinction was noted even at the time by the author of the satiric poem, "Civilizoo." As he tersely put it: "Women think fur beauty, / Scholars, books knowledge." Here was no showing off, but simple faith in the fetish.

It would be tedious to enumerate the myriad forms of the faith: they equal the number of consumable articles. Some, however, lent themselves to the arousing of fear preparatory to flattery. To be soothed by possession of the fetish, the citizen must be first alarmed by a dramatization of evil—halitosis, falling hair, teeth, garters, B. O. (undecipherable), as well as by the ever-present threat of Wrong Choice.

In this connection I may instance the farthest reach of magic power found in our documents. As with us, the Anglo-American word for "spirits" has a double meaning, for alcohol makes man cheerful and enterprising. But the ancients' impressionable souls seem to have drawn virtue not alone from the contents of the

bottle; they were affected by the label upon it, which conferred tone or talents on the buyer. Thus a celebrated whisky was normally advertised as being "For Men of Decision." One would have thought that the thing needed was a whisky for men of *In*-decision, but doubtless the poet was using the rhetorical figure known as hypallage—taking the result for the action. In a like manner, medicines, food and personal attire were, whenever possible, held up as proved fetishes.

In discussing any mythology, however "vital," one must consider the treatment accorded to the subject of death. At first, I believed that the ancients ignored it. I knew, to be sure, of a few covert eulogies of funeral parlors, but it was evident that the aim here was still to make the living comfortable. Then it occurred to me that the previously noted tendency to portray happy results without regard to probability might hold a clue to my problem. And it happened that I had on my hands a series of absolutely inexplicable ads. Putting two and two together gave me what I was looking for.

My unexplained series consisted of simple but beautiful compositions depicting entire families sitting about the fire in smooth white uniforms, deceptively like our own suits of underwear. The faces, suggesting the school of Puvis de Chavannes, are full of benignity and repose. The atmosphere, too, is unusual—hardly any luxuries, no hint of the muscular strain, due to toothache or dandruff, financial or scientific anxiety, which meets us elsewhere. More significant still, all marks of sex have disappeared. Young and old seem beyond self-consciousness, or indeed consciousness of any kind. I conclude that we are logically and mythologically bound to accept these beatific groups as showing us the way the ancients represented death.<sup>4</sup> I have in fact found one marked "After the Last Supper," but the words are pencilled in and may lack authority.

If we did not know how uncommon was the belief in an after-

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<sup>4</sup> We find the same serenity in the users of certain soap flakes. This coincidence suggests that the flakes procured euthanasia. One brand was significantly called Lux.

life during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, one could entertain the alternative that these classical figures were meant for angels. But mature reflection rules out this hypothesis; I will at most concede that they may have been Supermen, in the very special condition of immobility. Since all other icons show action, or at least animation, I find it far easier to believe that this sober grouping, these firm outlines, are the work of the religious artist contemplating death. Under conditions then prevailing, it happened more and more frequently that whole families died simultaneously. Their friends coming to pay their last visit, without any hope of reunion hereafter, would find them posed by the undertaker's art in familiar attitudes, clad in ritual white—in fact in that one-piece knitted suit as advertised, (with or without buttons) which would match the wreath of lilies and the silk-lined coffin. Over the abyss of centuries, one feels a catch in the throat at the thought of these once-living men, in whose desperate symbolism the white of snow, fitting like a new skin, meant death and peace.

Yet despite this symbol of hope, each year in midwinter—on December 25 to be exact—there occurred a nation-wide panic about the renewal of life. It may have come down from the old fear that the earth would not bear in spring. If so, with urbanization and technological farming the fear shifted from the earth to the self. Wearied by a routine divorced from nature, the citizen began to question his own survival. "Who and what am I, why so pale and listless?" Early November saw him sitting before a sunlamp to cure the paleness; the end of the month would see him, and particularly his wife, storming the shops.

It was a saturnalia of devotion to the goddess ADVT. The vernacular name Splurge indeed suggests a baptismal rite—to immerse oneself and wallow in things and be made new by contact. Life was goods after all. By an historical irony, the Anglo-Americans associated this feast with the short-lived founder of Christianity, who always showed the greatest alacrity in leaving his coat in another's hands, and who died possessed of one garment and three nails. His worshippers nonetheless celebrated his

birth in a smothering of cloaks, scarfs, ties, silks, baubles and furs. This fact proves again that myth and religion are uncertain allies, but it also enables us to feel the pathos of that puzzling lyric in the American Anthology:

The first thing to turn green in Spring  
Is the Christmas jewelry.

That "shopping" on these regular occasions was an essential part of mental health is naturally assumed by the advertisers. But the practical proof of the assumption was never more striking than in the serious incidents of the so-called Reconversion Period of the mid-forties. Drained of goods by war, the people nearly perished. They starved, not in their bodies but in their imaginations: six years virtually without the consolation of ads were to them as the suspension of the sacraments would be to us. The shops, though bare, were haunted by women as by insects seeking their prey, while the entire population grew irritable, dis-tempered, antisocial. Women fought over pylon hose (i.e., leg coverings) and men committed suicide for lack of telegrams. Diaries tell us that those who by luck secured even a single object—an icebox or a full-tailed shirt—showed the restorative effect immediately. It was at the worst of these bad times that a laconic sage summed up the mood in the famous phrase, "Money no Object."

### I I I

Such is, in rough outline, the mythology of the Anglo-Americans as far as archeological research can reconstruct it. I reserve the right to give a fuller account at some later time and to make it more vivid, though I trust not more persuasive, by the addition of plates in color. Meanwhile it may help to settle any lingering doubts if I conclude with a few words on the historical link between the faith in ADVT, on the one hand, and the powerful class of medicine men, on the other.

What distinguishes ADVT from all other great creeds is that its beginnings were perfectly natural and its final form complete-

ly miraculous. But at all times it was entangled with established religions. We know that the Greeks, almost as soon as they learned to write, began to inscribe curses on sheets of lead, which were then placed in their temples to call down the vengeance of the god on the person so advertised.

In the early Middle Ages, the public crier could be hired for any sort of advertising and it is on record that new religious dogmas were sometimes entrusted to his powers of publicity. Throughout every period, the marriage market made use of kindred devices and called on the gods to further and sanctify the deed. With the advent of the daily printed sheet, about the middle of the eighteenth century, the real cult of ADVT begins. Dr. Samuel Johnson, an early anthropologist, complains in 1759 of abuses then coming into practice: "It is become necessary to gain attention by magnificence of promises and by eloquence sometimes sublime, sometimes pathetic . . ." and it is "a moral question" whether advertisers do not "play too wantonly with our passions."<sup>5</sup>

But the junction of all the elements into what I ventured to call a *mytho-pinaco-prosopopoeia* (fable in pictures personifying things) came at the end of Dr. Johnson's century, when a medicine man of Bristol, Dr. Joseph Fry, had the revelation that his Maker had chosen him to extend the business of importing cocoa, and had ordained the means. He carried out this injunction in a 'small way at first, then on a national scale; himself boasting that he was the first man, not indeed to import cocoa, but to import the idea of a *signed guarantee on each and every package* into the distribution of goods. From him were descended the brothers Smith, Lydia Pinkham, and other eponymous figures worthy to rank with Beowulf.

In time, the signed guarantee became superfluous. A strong assertion in print, with an illustration lending color to it, sufficed to make converts. The suffering martyrs to a cough became willing martyrs to *Rem*, the well-named. But an overextension of this true church nearly caused its undoing: too many rival assertions neutralized one another. New guarantees were needed, full-

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<sup>5</sup> *The Idler* No. 40.

er of Authority than manufacturers could command. They appealed, and not in vain, to a new class of medicine men, the laboratory testers.<sup>6</sup> Their success was shown by the fact that in a short time all advertising emanated from a few Oratories and Laboratories, keeping up, for appearance' sake, a pretended competition among products.

In the final phase, the tester was simply symbolized by a white coat, a piece of apparatus, and the look of a seer. Behind him, invisible but using him and his device, was the newest type of Thaumaturgist, to whom no miracles were impossible. I refer to the Expert in Public Relations. He was believed capable of making fraud innocuous, starvation pleasant, and wars remote. It was rumored that such a man had once succeeded in making the public take an interest in the curriculum of a university. But this exaggeration can be dismissed.

Heretics could now and then be found who tried to undermine the common faith. But their small numbers can be inferred from the fact that they were never molested. They might deride mythology, calling its effect "the massage of the mass age," the larger body of believers could ignore them and sincerely continue their search for myth. Perhaps this was as it should be, for myth will move mankind most when they do not call it so, and what men find indispensable, they preserve. The conveniences of life, as their name implies, are matters of convention; so Chesterfield must forever repeat "They Satisfy," though things in themselves do not. But things enhanced by art and color, sex and slogans, did give the illusions of a lotus-eating life to the men of the strange civilization I have described. The role of ADVT was to suffuse visible matter with invisible virtues, adding to bread the nutrition it had lost and to stone or steel the warmth it had never had.

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<sup>6</sup> "A medicine man sits on a deerskin when he makes medicine. He puts herbs in a can, adds water and blows bubbles through a straw to purify it."—From a contemporary account.

# Finnegan The Wake

by Joseph Campbell



## I

"riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs":

*Finnegans Wake* breaks open like a Baedeker. It is a bulky guidebook to a portentous, queerly somnolent, unstable landscape: the interior of a dreaming being. James Joyce begins the book, parodying the manner of a learned and fervid professor-guide—a cicerone solicitous to unfold every legend inhering in the details of the scene to which he is introducing us. And though the sleeping being in whose interior we perambulate would never himself have guessed how cosmic the connotations of the figments of his dream, nevertheless we, the tourist party, thanks to the inexhaustible erudition of our garrulous courier, behold, in a spun-out vision, the whole history and form of the macrocosm, their correspondence to the biography and anatomy of the microcosm, and the permanence within all of the immanent Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. "It was allso agreeenable," we are moved to exclaim, as our luminous night-charabanc—gearless, clutchless—draws to the close of its instructive round (p. 609): "It was allso agreeenable in our sinegear clutchless, touring the no placelike no timelike absolent . . . , like so many unprobables in their poor suit of the impossable." And so indeed it was. And so it will be again, next time we peer into this "most dantellising . . . lingerous longerous book of the dark."

The guide, like everything else in the volume, undergoes a series of metamorphoses; and the tourist-party becomes, correspondingly, now a class of inattentive urchins, "snifflynosed, gosling-

necked, clothheaded, tangled in your lacings, tingled in your pants, etsitaraw, etcicero," now the invisible radio public, or again, a rural sleuth's dull-witted assistant, a cringing native porter bearing the white man's burden of some ranging Mungo Park, or a beady-eyed Huck Finn observing the shadows on somebody's bedroom blind. Paleontology, archeology, paleography, and landscape-gardening, are among the professor's favorite themes of discourse. He manipulated the "pudendascope" of psycho-analysis "when they were yung and easily freudened," so that he knows that "*father* . . . is not always that undemonstrative relative who settles our hashbill for us." And his ever-ready learning so abounds in folklore, myth and fable, theology and metaphysics, that he finds himself competent to refer every scintilla of phenomenal experience, whether objective or subjective, back to its noumenon in the mind of God.

Behind the multifarious, sometimes annoying, masquerade, sits the author, Joyce; now and then he sets the marionette aside to talk in person, still jokingly, with the reader. One is puzzled to guess where he is teasing, where serious, until at last it begins to dawn that the mode of disorderly burlesque is precisely James Joyce's deepest seriousness. This shocking realization opens the secret of his fundamentally dreamlike, anti-tragical, *mythological* craft<sup>1</sup>—an ambiguous, paradoxical art, of which François Rabelais was perhaps the last considerable Occidental practitioner.

"If there is any difficulty in reading what I write," James Joyce once observed to his friend Frank Budgen, "it is because of the material I use. In my case the thought is always simple."<sup>2</sup> The thought is that of the symbolic archetypes of mythology and metaphysics, familiar to mankind for millenniums and throughout the world. Mythology being the traditional picture-language of metaphysics (a disillusioning, entirely unsentimental, ideographic presentation of the formal principles of the cosmos), it is

<sup>1</sup> "A dream frequently has the profoundest meaning in the places where it seems most absurd" (Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Modern Library ed. of *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, p. 422).

<sup>2</sup> Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses*, London, 1934, p. 291.

informed throughout by repose, even though its modes are variously whimsical, ludicrous, grandiose, and horrific. This is the case, likewise, in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. A prodigious anonymity of feeling, indifferent alike to vice and virtue, a readiness to permit not only civilizations, but universes, galaxies of universes, to be generated and annihilated in the wheeling rounds of time, is the sign of the apocalypse of this trans-humanistic, biologicico-astronomical revelation. "The oaks of ald now they lie in peat yet elms leap where askes lay" (p. 4). "Teems of times and happy returns. The seim anew" (p. 215). "All's set for restart after the silence" (p. 382). "The Hereweareagain Gaieties" (p. 455). The atom "explodotonates" on page 353 of *Finnegans Wake*; no minutes, no seconds later, the two annihilated parties are shaking hands again. "Mere man's mime: God has jest. The old order changeth and lasts like the first" (p. 486). "Weeping shouldst not thou be when man falls but that divine scheming ever adoring be" (p. 563) . . . "in that multimirror megaron of returning-ties, whirled without end to end" (p. 582).

The peoples of India know the myth of the Cosmic Being, who sleeps, and whose dream is the history of the world. He reposes on the waters of eternity, couched on Ananta ("Endless"), the Cosmic Serpent. From his navel a great lotus grows and blossoms: the golden corolla is the flower of the world. In its center is the mountain of the gods, Mount Sumeru; the petals are the radiating continents. Mankind, the gods, and the demons inhabiting the under side of the petals, come into existence, love and battle, undergo the vicissitudes of history, and presently dissolve again—the lotus having completed the cycle of its natural season. Everything in the universe then disintegrates into the organism of the sleeping, blissful, macrocosmic giant. And during the subsequent night only the god exists, reposing on the boundless, everlasting waters. The lotus reappears; the golden bud expands. The goddess Padma ("Lotus") opens to the dawn, and the history of the universe begins anew: "his goldwhite swaystick aloft ylifted, umbrilla-parasoul" (p. 569). "Umbrella history," this is termed in *Finnegans Wake* (p. 573). "Now day, slow day,

from delicate to divine, divases. Padma, brighter and sweetster, this flower that bells, it is our hour of risings. Tickle, tickle. Lotus spray. Till herenext. Adya" (p. 598).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Divases: from the Sanskrit root *div*, "to shine, to be glad"; the noun *div*, *divas*, means "day"; vases suggests the opening chalice of the bud. "Divases" is to be read as the present tense (third person singular) of a verb; its subject, "day." *Padma* (Skr.) means "lotus." *Adya* (Skr.) is "today." "Umbrilla" suggests "umbilicus." "Parasoul" (*para* [Skr.] signifies "supreme") means "Oversoul"; cf. Emerson.

Joyce has precedent for his Lotus-Umbrella correlation. The lotus stemming from Vishnu's navel is cognate with the Tree of Life atop the central mountain of the world (in Hindu iconography, the Jambu tree atop Mount Sumeru); this tree, in turn, is duplicated by the symbolical umbrella on the summit of the traditional Buddhist reliquary mound (e.g. Stupa I at Sanchi; cf. Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, New York, 1946, Fig. 63). A Christian counterpart of the World Lotus growing from Vishnu's navel will be recognized in the Tree of Jesse: the genealogical tree of Christ's descent, which is represented in Christian art as rooted in Jesse, the father of David (example: Tree of Jesse Window, Chartres Cathedral). Jesus as the culminating blossom of the Tree of Jesse is a homologue of the Buddha seated on the lotus.

Mountain, Navel, Tree, and Lotus, are variant representations of the mythological figure of the *axis mundi*, i.e. the point where the abundance of eternity flows into and becomes the abundance of time. This point is rediscovered by the striving individual in that center of intellection where the contraries of empirical experience are transcended and eternity is apprehended in a luminous instant (the young James Joyce's "luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure"; *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Modern Library ed., p. 250). Buddha attained Illumination under the Bo-tree on the Immovable Spot (*axis mundi*, World Navel); Jesus won the Victory of Holy Rood upon the hill (Golgotha, Calvary) which in medieval iconography is represented as the center of the world.

Joyce's use of such images is always consistent with their traditional connotations. His effects are achieved by surprising identifications (lotus with umbrella, umbrella with umbilicus, sleeping man with reliquary mound). Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, Joyce's Cosmic Man (H. C. E. equals Here Comes Everybody), flourishes like a "buaboabaybohm, litting flop a deadlop (aloose!) to lee but lifting a bennbranch a yardlong (ivoeh!) on the breezy side (for showm!), the height of Brewster's chimpney and as broad below as Phineas Barnum" (p. 29). A description of him as the Cosmic Tree-Man-Angel ("The form masculine. The gender feminine.") appears on pp. 503-506. His initials peer through the "Howth Castle and Environs" of the first sentence of the book: he is the Hill of Howth.

In conclusion, it should be noted that umbrellas were used first ceremonially and symbolically, not practically; the umbrella was a symbolic tree held over the head of a king. As the Anointed of God, the king was the Hero of the Tree, and where he stood, that was the *axis mundi*. Jonas Hanway (1712-1786), the first gentleman to carry an umbrella in London, was stoned in the street. "Saint Jamas Hanway, servant of Gamp, lapidated," we read in *Finnegans Wake*, p.449.

The image of the universe-as-dream is a dominant theme of myth and metaphysics: the forms of the phenomenal world are regarded as the unsubstantial metamorphoses of a primal conscious substance that never dies, was never born, is omnipresent, and is the seed-life of all things.<sup>4</sup> *La vida es sueño* (Calderón): we are such stuff as dreams are made on (Shakespeare's Prospero). The fantasies (ourselves included) become manifest and disappear again, but are nothing in themselves. *Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis* (Goethe). The wise, the completely dis-illusioned, are attached to nothing at all.

## II

The state of the Cosmic Dreamer is approximated in sleep—where the phantasmagoria that passes before the sleeper's eye is a little counterpart of the Creator's vision of the world. The concept of deep dream as oracle we know from many literary and religious documents. It is basic to the works of Dante, Joyce's pre-eminent model. "I found myself in a dark wood . . . I cannot well report how I entered it, so full was I of slumber at that moment" (*Inferno* I. 2, 10-11). The prophetic vision was a favorite subject with Irish writers of the Middle ages.<sup>5</sup> And Chaucer, following the tradition of his medieval craft, respected the dream ("sweven") as a kind of minor revelation.

God turne us every dreem to gode!  
For hit is wonder, by the rode,  
To my wit, what causeth swevenes  
Either on morwes, or on evenes;

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<sup>4</sup> "Weapons cut It not; fire burns It not; water wets It not; the wind does not wither It. Eternal, all-pervading, unchanging, immovable, the Self is the same for ever" (*Bhagavad-Gita* 2. 23, 24). "The spirit wanders, comes now here, now there, and occupies whatever frame it pleases. From beasts it passes into human bodies, and from our bodies into beasts, but never perishes" (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15. 165-168). "When we all sing, it is that One Man who sings in us" (St. Augustine, *In Ps.* 122). "He is ee and no counter he who will be ultimately respunchable for the hubbub caused in Edenborough" *Finnegans Wake*, p. 29).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. C. S. Boswell, *An Irish Precursor of Dante, A Study of the Vision of Heaven and Hell ascribed to the Eighth-century Irish Saint Adamnan*, London, 1908.

And why th'effect folweth of somme,  
 And of somme hit shal never come;  
 Why that is an avisioun,  
 And this a revelacioun;  
 Why this a dreem, why that a sweven,  
 And nat to every man liche even;  
 Why this a fantom, these oracles,  
 I noot; but who-so of these miracles  
 The causes knoweth bet than I,  
 Devyne he . . . . —(*The Hous of Fame* I. 1-14.)

Apparently it is a universal belief that when our powers of attention become detached, in sleep, from the commitment of the bodily organs and senses to the incoherent impressions and necessities of daily living, they subside into a supernatural stillness that unites the individual with the primal life that is his essential being. "At that time the Seer rests in his own state" (Patanjali). "The mind of the Sage at rest becomes the mirror of the universe" (Chwang Tzu). "There, in clairvoyant-sleep, that divinity intuits Greatness. Whatever has been seen he proximately sees, whatever has been heard he proximately hears. Whatever has been and has not been seen, whatever has been heard and has not been heard, intuitively-known or unknown, good or evil, whatever has been directly-experienced in any land or airt, again and again he directly-experiences; he sees it all, he sees it all" (*Prashna Upanishad* 4. 5).<sup>6</sup>

This is the sense of the sleep of the tavern-keeper, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker (H. C. E., Mr. Here Comes Everybody), the hero of *Finnegans Wake*. Though in daytime he is muffled in the "sleep of ignorance in which most people pass their conscious lives,"<sup>7</sup> nevertheless, within the depth of dream his spirit partakes of the wisdom of the All in all of us. When he awakes he will have forgotten again; but for a time—the time of dreaming—visions are presented to his inner eye that match, in both quality and detail, the symbolical apparitions vouchsafed to the

<sup>6</sup> Cited by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in his article, "Recollection, Indian and Platonic" (*Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Supplement 3, April-June 1944), pp. 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> Rumi, *Mathnawi* 4. 3067. Cited *ib.*, p. 4.

seers.<sup>8</sup> And just as the psycho-analyst following the thread of the dreams of his patient penetrates into the subconscious that supports, yet remains unknown to, the citizen before him, so likewise do we, following the "riverrun" of the nightmare of H. C. E.—"this nonday diary, this allnights newseryreel" (p. 489)—enter awake the instructive zone of the hero's sleep. We are like that miraculous old yogi, Markandeya, who survived the dissolution of the world and went intact into the corpus of the Cosmic Giant when the flower of the universe completed its day and was reabsorbed.<sup>9</sup> Alert, we wander in the somnolent, queer landscape of memories disintegrating, ideals becoming reconstituted, portentous premonitions, desires remarkably fulfilled. Houris of delight, jinn of dread, are there; as well as figures laboring at purgatorial tasks "most dantellising." And our guide, it now appears, is Virgil, opening our minds to the meaning of these incredible yet intimately recollected circles of torture, toil, and joy.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "In that which is night to all beings, the man of self-control is awake" (*Bhagavad-Gita* 2. 69). The *Gita* is the "Bhagafat gaiters" worn by H. C. E. (p. 35).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Zimmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-50.

<sup>10</sup> *Finnegans Wake* corresponds to Dante's *Purgatorio*, as *Ulysses* to the *Inferno*. (Cf. Thomas McGreevy, "The Catholic Element in *Work in Progress*," article printed in *Our exagmination round his factification for incamination of Work in Progress*, Shakespeare & Co., Paris, 1929, pp. 119-127. "Mr. Joyce never loses sight of the fact that the principality of hell and the state of purgatory are in life and by the law of nature not less within us than the kingdom of heaven"—p. 125.)

The Christian image of purgatory is cognate with the Oriental of Metempsychosis. These are two ways of symbolizing the mystery of the Progress of the Soul, i.e., the gradual purgation from consciousness of the delusory fears and desires that attach the ego to the ephemera of phenomenal existence and preclude the soul from that beatific experience of Being which is its proper state. "Not till the soul knows all that there is to be known can she pass over to the unknown good" (Meister Eckhart). The Christian mythology provides purgatory and the Oriental a series of additional lives to allay the life lust and prepare the spirit for its perfect centeredness.

In *Finnegans Wake* the Mount-of-Purgatory theme coalesces with the World Mountain, and the synthesis is immediately equated with the Wheel of Rebirth, which is identical with the Time-Cycle: "The untireties of livesliving being the one substance of a streamsbecoming" (p. 597). The center of the Wheel (*axis mundi*) corresponds to the summit of the Mountain (Terrestrial Paradise). In *Finnegans Wake* that point of illumined repose is never quite attained. The

Dante's progress had its ancient counterpart in the ordeal of the Egyptian mummy-soul in Amenti, on its lonely and dangerous journey to the throne room of Osiris. And as the poet-visionary was guided through the spheres of trial by the instructions of the initiator Virgil, so the departed "Osiris N."<sup>11</sup> by the instructions of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, a copy of which was placed in the mummy-case before the lid was closed. James Joyce once suggested to his friend Mr. Budgen that he should compose an article on *Finnegans Wake* and title it, "James Joyce's Book of the Dead."<sup>12</sup> The interminable lecturing of Joyce's hermetic guide frequently resounds with dim re-echoings from the musty Chapters of the Praises of Re, the Chapter of Giving a Mouth to Osiris N., the Chapter of the Opening of the Mouth of Osiris N., the Chapter of Coming Forth by Day in the Underworld, and the Chapter of the Negative Confession. Our cicerone actually transforms himself momentarily into the brittle-dry papyrus, and "we seem to us (the real Us!) to be reading our Amenti in the sixth sealed chapter of the going forth by black" (p. 62):

"Thou hast closed the portals of the habitations of thy chil-

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crisis is approached but reneged on p. 608:

"Passing. One. We are passing. Two. From sleep we are passing. Three. Into the wikeawades world from sleep we are passing. Four. Come, hours, be ours!

"But still. Ah diar, ah diar! And stay."

One page before the last in the book we read: "It's something fails us. First we feel. Then we fall" (p. 627).

Had the transition been effected, the experience would have been transmuted from the purgatorial to the heavenly. But Joyce was reserving the beatitudes of Paradise for a third and final volume, which was to have treated of the timeless, boundless sea: that cosmic water of immortality on which reposes the Lord, the Cosmic Giant, dreaming his dream of the world.

<sup>11</sup> The man or woman who had died was identified with, and called, Osiris. N. here stands for the personal name of the deceased, which was added to the supernatural appellation (Osiris Aufankh, Osiris Ani, etc.). In *Finnegans Wake* "Here Comes Everybody," "Haveth Childers Everywhere," etc., are the supernatural "death-titles" of the man who in daily life is known as Mr. Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Budgen, "James Joyce," article printed in *Horizon*, Vol. III, No. 14, London, February, 1941.

dren and thou hast set thy guards thereby, even Garda Didymus and Garda Domas, that thy children may read in the book of the opening of the mind to light and err not in the darkness which is the afterthought of thy nomatter by the guardiance of those guards which are thy bodemen" (p. 258). "The keykeeper of the keys of the seven doors of the dreamadoory in the house of the household of Hecech saysaith" (p. 377): "O, lord of the barrels, comer forth from Anow (I have not mislaid the key of Efas-Taem), O, Ana, bright lady, comer forth from Thenanow (I have not left temptation in the path of the sweeper of the threshold), O!" (p. 311). "I have performed the law in truth for the lord of the law, Taif Alif. I have held out my hand for the holder of my heart in Annapolis, my youthrib city. Be ye then my protectors unto Mussabotomia before the guards of the city" (p. 318). "For (peace peace perfectpeace!) I have abwaited me in Elin and I have placed my reeds intectis before the Registower of the perception of tribute in the hall of the city of Analbe" (p. 364). — "You are pure. You are pure. You are in your puerity. You have not brought stinking members into the house of Aman-ti. Elleb Inam, Titep Notep, we name them to the Hall of Honor. Your head has been touched by the god Enel-Rah and your face has been brightened by the goddess Aruc-Ituc" (p. 237). "Upon the night of the things of the night of the making to stand up the double tet of the oversear of the seize who cometh from the mighty deep and on the night of the making of Horuse to crihumph over his enemy . . ." (p. 328) ". . . forgetting to say their grace before chambadory, before going to boat with the verges of the chaptel of the opering of the month of Nema Knatut . . ." (p. 395). "Amen, ptah!" (p. 411). "Irise, Osirises! Be thy mouth given unto thee! . . . The overseer of the house of the oversire of the seas, Nu-Men, triumphant, sayeth: Fly as the hawk, cry as the corncrake, Ani Latch of the postern is thy name; shout!" (p. 493). "The eversower of the seeds of light to the cowl'd owld sows that are in the domnatory of Defmut after the night of the carrying of the word of Nuahs and the night of making Mehs to cuddle up in a coddlepot, Pu Nuseht, lord of risings

in the yonderworld of Ntamplin, tohp triumphant, speaketh" (p. 593). "Bosse of Upper and Lower Byggorstrade, Ciwareke, may he live for river!" (p. 602).<sup>13</sup>

## I V

Hell, purgatory, and heaven are within: Dante's progress through the (macrocosmic) spheres was outward evidence of the profounding of his own (microcosmic) being. His coming to the Father on High corresponded to his knowledge of the Son Within: the two were consubstantial.

In Egypt, apparently, the conception of the problem was identical. The papyrus guided the voyager past the chambers of peril (the Chapter of Beating Back the Crocodile; the Chapter of Repulsing Serpents; the Chapter of Driving Back the Two Merti Goddesses; the Chapter of Driving Away the Slaughterings which are Performed in the Underworld; the Chapter of not letting the Soul of a Man be taken from him in the Underworld), and brought him safely to the throne room of the God. Then he who had been named "Osiris" on his deathbed beheld Osiris, and comprehended that himself and the divinity, the knower and

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<sup>13</sup> The strange name of Joyce's hero, "Earwicker" (scrambled above as "Ciwareke"), becomes suddenly meaningful in this Egyptian context. The name is humorously accounted for in *Finnegans Wake* (pp. 30-31) as derived from earwig ("ear-beetle"): the earwig is popularly supposed to creep into the ear of a person asleep and get into his brain. This "dangerous" insect is Joyce's Irish counterpart and parody of the scarabeus (the Mediterranean "dung beetle"), which in Egyptian iconography represents Khepera, the sun-god, and is a primary symbol of resurrection and immortality. (The scarabeus rolls before it a large ball of dung, from which its young are brooded: the sun-disk was likened to such a life-productive dung-ball rolled before the god.) A little faience, ivory, or stone representation of this beetle, bearing an inscription on the flat under-side, was placed, with a prayer, over the heart of the mummy before the mummy-case was closed. This symbolized the presence of the vital solar principle, by virtue of which Osiris N. should awake immortal. Though symbolized in the beetle, the god was actually within, as the permanent actuator, forgotten during the dream of life. The prayer and symbol served to precipitate recollection.

Comparably, Earwicker ("Awaker"): he is the earwig in the sleeper's (i.e. reader's) ear. And *Finnegans Wake* itself is the accompanying papyrus, *The Book of the Dead*.

the known, creature and creator, the Son and the Father, were consubstantial. "He is I, and I am he."<sup>14</sup>

This is a problem that beset James Joyce from the beginning.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *The Book of the Dead*, Chapter of Coming Forth by Day in the Underworld: "I am Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow, and I have the power to be born a second time; I am the divine hidden Soul who createth the gods, and who giveth sepulchral meals unto the denizens of the Underworld, of Amenti, and of Heaven. I am the rudder of the east, the possessor of two divine faces wherein his beams are seen. I am the lord of the men who are raised up; the lord who cometh forth out of darkness, and whose forms of existence are of the house wherein are the dead. Hail, ye two hawks who are perched upon your resting-places, who harken unto the things which are said by him, who guide the bier to the hidden place, who lead along Re, and who follow him into the uppermost place of the shrine which is in the celestial heights! Hail, lord of the shrine which standeth in the middle of the earth. He is I, and I am he, and Ptah hath covered his sky with crystal."

<sup>15</sup> Throughout *Ulysses* Stephen Dedalus was obsessed with the problem of the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son. "A *lex eterna* stays about Him. Is that then the divine substance wherein Father and Son are consubstantial?" (*Ulysses*, Paris ed., p. 38; American ed., p. 39). "Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting, is unknown to man. It is a mystical estate, an apostolic succession, 'from only begetter to only begotten. On that mystery and not on the madonna which the cunning Italian intellect flung to the mob of Europe the church is founded and founded irremovably because founded, like the world, micro and macrocosm, upon the void. Upon incertitude, upon unlikelihood" (pp. 198-199; 204-205). "We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves" (p. 204; 210). The crisis of recognition occurs in the underworld scene of the brothel, where Stephen ("Son"), cogitating at the upright piano, turns and sees Leopold Bloom ("Father"). "STEPHEN (*at the piano*): What went forth to the ends of the world to traverse not itself. God, the sun, Shakespeare, a commercial traveller, having itself traversed in reality itself becomes that self . . . which it itself was ineluctably preconditioned to become. Ecco! . . . (*Stephen turns and sees Bloom.*)" (pp. 476-477; 494-495). The shared meal in the Bloom kitchen (pp. 633-655; 660-682) is the sacramental union of "Son" and "Father," the pair of opposites ("poles apart," p. 593; 618). Immediately thereafter, Stephen vanishes in the night (p. 660; 688), and Bloom goes into the womb of sleep (p. 693; 722). Molly in her sleepful mind compounds the two (pp. 731-735; 763-768), and the volume ends.—But in the riverrun of *Finnegans Wake*, Anna Livia Plurabelle's "untitled mamafesta memorialising the Mosthighest" (*F. W.*, p. 104), Son and Father reappear, reborn, but now indissolubly synthesized. For the differentiated egos of the normal day world (*Ulysses* is *all* egos) "by the coincidence of their contraries re-amalgamerge" (p. 49) in this "harmonic condenser enginium . . . so as to serve him up a melegoturny marygoround, eclectically filtered for allirish earths and ohmes" (pp. 309-310). "Under the closed eyes of the inspectors the traits featuring the *chiaroscuro* coalesce, their contrarieties eliminated, in one stable somebody" (p. 107).

In *Finnegans Wake* it is a dominant theme: developed, opened out, collapsed, inverted, parodied, and profoundly sounded. The author has gathered illustrations from an astonishing number of the world's mythologies, sacred writings, and secular literary productions; and as though to show that it inhabits not only the sublime formulae of the saints and sages but the playful imageries of popular life as well, he has strung all the gathered pearls of his eclectic "monomyth" on the simple coarse thread of a comical Irish-American song.

Hod carrier Tim Finnegan, a very hard drinker, one morning at the top of his ladder "filt tippling full. His howd feeled heavy, his hoddit did shake. (There was a wall of course in erection.) Dimb! He stottered from the latter. Damb! he was dud. Dumn! Mastabatoom, mastabatomm. . . ." (p. 6).<sup>16</sup> At the wake were "all the hoolivans of the nation," and "the all gianed in with the shoutmost shoviality. Agog and magog and the round of them agrog . . . Tee the tootal of the fluid hang the twoddle of the

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<sup>16</sup> "The ladder in man is the soul; the foot of which is as it were its earthly part, sensation, while its head is as it were its heavenly part, the purest Mind. Up and down through all of it the 'words' (*logoi*) go incessantly" (Philo, *De Som.* 23).

The ladder between heaven and earth is a universally known mythological image (Stith Thompson, *Motif-index of Folk-literature*, Indiana University Studies, Nos. 96-112, heading: F52). In the Judeo-Christian tradition it appears as Jacob's Ladder (Genesis 28. 11-16), and as the cabalistic "Ladder (or Tree) of Emanations" (Christian D. Ginsburg, *The Kabbalah*, London, 1920, p. 100). The ladder is the navel cord (*axis mundi*) between heaven and earth.

Tim's hod is his counterpart of the Cross. This also is a symbol of the Axis. The mystery of the Circulation of God's Grace is represented by the hod carrier's perpetual ascending and descending of the ladder. The mystery of the identity of macrocosm and microcosm is suggested by the co-existence of the ladder (general, macrocosmic axis) and the hod (individual, microcosmic axis). Each of us has his hod to carry, and we all move up and down, and around, the universal ladder. Compare pp. 4-5, describing the tower of Finnegan's construction: "a waalworth of a skyerscape of most eyeful hoyth entowerly, erigenating from next to nothing and celescalating the himals and all, hierarchitect-itiptitoploftical, with a burning bush abob off its baubletop and with larrons o'toolers clittering up and tombles a'buckets clottering down." (World Tower: World Mountain: World Tree.)

Finnegan's mastaba-tomb prepares us for the Egyptian-mummy theme of the Book-of-the-Dead passages.

fuddled, O!" (p. 6). A gush of whisky (*Usqueadbaugham*, p. 24) was accidentally dashed over the corpse:

"Och, he revives! See how he raises!"  
And Timothy, jumping from the bed,  
Cried out, while he lathered round like blazes,  
"Soul of the divil! Did ye think me dead?"  
Whack, hurroo. Now take up your partners;  
Welt the flure; your trotters shake.  
Isn't all the truth I've told ye;  
Lots of fun at Finegan's wake.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Last verse and chorus of the song, "Finegan's Wake."

The whisky works two ways: on the one hand it precipitates the Fall ("The Cup of Bitterness"), but on the other brings about the Resurrection ("The Living Waters"). In this connection it should be noted that Finnegans's hod may be likened to a great cup which he carries up to God filled with Matter (bricks), and down to man, filled with Spirit (air: *pneuma*). Compare the words of Hermes Trismegistos: "He filled a mighty Cup with it (with Mind), and sent it down, joining a Herald to it, to whom He gave command to make this proclamation to the hearts of men: 'Baptize thyself with this Cup's baptism . . . Thou that hast faith, thou canst ascend to Him that hath sent down the Cup'" (Hermes, *Lib.* 5, the book called "The Cup, or Monad," par. 4). And now the words of Macrobius: ". . . the soul is dragged back into body, hurried on by new intoxication, desiring to taste a fresh draught of the superfluity of naughtiness (the overflow of "matter"), whereby it is weighted down and brought back to earth. The Cup of Father Liber (Dionysos, Bacchus) is a symbol of this mystery; and this is what the Ancients called the River of Lethe" (*Comment. in Som. Scip.*, XI. ii. 66).

The River of Lethe is Joyce's River Liffey (riverrun), which is personified as Anna Livia Plurabelle (A. L. P.), the mother of life: "our callback mother . . . over her possetpot" (p. 294); "old missus wipethemdry . . . happy tea area, naughtygay frew" (p. 578). Anna Livia's everlasting cup of tea ("the mothering pot"—p. 20) corresponds to the Cup in which the World Creator mixed the elements of the universe (Plato, *Timaeus*, 41D). "Father Times and Mother Species boil their kettle with their crutch" (p. 600). As such it is a miniature of the universe and a source of revelations. Compare Genesis 44:5: "The cup . . . in which my lord drinketh, and in which he is wont to divine." "Miss Rachel Lea Varian, she tells forkings for baschfellors, under purdah of card palmer teaput tosspot Madam d'Elta" (p. 221).

The motif of the Two Cups appears in *Finnegans Wake* under the images of (1.) the evening drink that puts to sleep (Finnegan's fall, pp. 5-6; Earwicker's collapse, pp. 381-382) and (2.) the breakfast cup of tea or coffee that awakens ("when cup, platter, and pot come piping hot"—p. 615). The two represent the counterplay of opposites (death and birth, spirit and matter, fall and redemption, evil and good, etc.) within the field of creation. Tea as "The Cup of Bitterness" (Christ's taste of gall on the Cross) is suggested in the phrase: "with a capital Tea for Thirst!" (p. 302); capital Tea having already been presented as the Cross on p. 235: "T will be waiting for uns as I sold U at the

The relationship of this vivacious scene to the mystery and Saturnalia of the Killed and Resurrected God—as described, for example, by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*—is obvious. The *Wake* resounds with echoes of the world's dying divinities: John Barleycorn, Osiris, Bacchus, the little wren of St. Stephen's Day ("Wreneagle Almighty"—p. 383; "The wren, the wren, the king of all birds"—p. 44, 340, 348, 363, 376, 430, 504, etc.). And just as the death of the god is the life of his communion, so likewise that of Tim. "Life . . . is a wake, livit or kriket, and on the bunk of our breadwinning lies the cropse of our seedfather" (p. 55). Prostrate, "dead," Finnegan is our world-sustaining landscape. "From Shopalist to Bailywick or from ashtun to baro-noath or from Buythebanks to Roundthehead or from the foot of the bill to ireglint's eye he calmly extensolies" (p. 6); particularly, the landscape stretching westward under Dublin, from the Hill of Howth to the grassy hillocks of Phoenix Park. "The cranic head on him, caster of his reasons, peer yuthner in yond-mist. Whooth? His clay feet, swarded in verdigrass, stick up starck where he last fellonem, by the mund of the magazine wall" (p. 7). Finnegan is the past; what was; the dimly remembered; the forgotten: upon which the present is constructed and continuously feeding. Megaliths (menhirs, cromlechs, dolmens, "giant beds" and "giant graves") from the Neolithic are his handiwork. And he is of the sacred number of those titanic legendary heroes who sleep within the living mountains (Ireland's Finn MacCool, for example) awaiting the day when they shall rise to set their people free. "Liverpoor; Sot a bit of it! His braynes coolt parritch, his pelt nassy, his heart's adrone, his bluidstreams acrawl, his puff but a piff, his extremities extremely so. . . . Words weigh no more to him than raindrops to Rethfernhim. Which we all like. Rain. When we sleep. Drops. But wait until our sleeping. Drain Sdops" (p. 74).

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first antries." Tea as "The Living Waters" we find on p. 406: "Tea is the Highest! For auld lang Ayternitay!" Finally, a certain dubiousness as to which is which of the pair of opposites is suggested by the revelation on p. 492 that the fluid in the bottle carried on a certain occasion by A. L. P. was not beer but urine. (Compare *Ulysses*, Paris ed. pp. 12-13; American ed. p. 14.)

For in Joyce's version of the wake, when the whisky was splashed and the corpse stirred to rise, the company pressed the old man down again. "Now be aisy, good Mr. Finnimore, sir. And take your laysure like a god on pension and don't be walking abroad" (p. 24). The present—the quick moment of the NOW—had passed him and already presented itself in another incarnation: "a big rody ram lad . . . with a pocked wife in pickle . . . two twilling bugs and one midgit pucelle" (pp. 28-29).<sup>18</sup> Finnegan is of the generation of the grandfathers: "Move up Mumpty! Mike room for Rumpty! By order, Nickekellous Plugg" (p. 99), and the whole order of the present has been founded on the supposition of his demise.

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<sup>18</sup> I.e., Mr. H. C. Earwicker (the new tavernkeeper in Chapelizod), Annie or Anna his wife, Shem and Shaun his sons, and Isabel his daughter. See Campbell and Robinson, *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*, pp. 3-23.

Edmund Wilson's early articles, "H. C. Earwicker and Family," and "The Dream of H. C. Earwicker," *New Republic*, June 28 and July 12, 1939 (later united in his volume, *The Wound and the Bow*) are still among the best discussions of the domestic circumstances of the Earwicker household. Mr. Wilson made the mistake, however, of assigning to Annie, Earwicker's wife, the name Maggie, by which Joyce designates one of her rivals. (The Maggies, pp. 7, 142, etc., are the servant-girl temptresses in the park.) This error was inherited by several subsequent American elucidators (e.g. Harry Levin, *James Joyce*, New Directions Books, 1941, pp. 150, 200). Mr. Wilson also made the mistake of describing the encyclopedic text as the stream of consciousness, or rather unconsciousness (the dream), of the moderately educated Mr. Earwicker, whereas from the first sentence the explicatory language is that of a universally informed and alert observer and interpreter—not the dreamer. Following Wilson, it has become standard practice in Joyce criticism to observe that one is hard put to account for the range of the unlearned tavern-keeper's stream of fantasies (viz. Levin, *op. cit.*, p. 175).

But James Joyce has, in fact, so little confined us to Mr. Earwicker's stream of unconsciousness that for the final monologue (pp. 619-628) we have entered the mind of Anna; and in the bedroom scenes of Book III, Chapter 4, we are studying, externally, both the husband and the wife ("Man with night-cap, in bed, fore. Woman with curl-pins, hind. Discovered."—p. 559). On pages 556-557 we see the so-called dreamer walking up a flight of stairs; and pages 576-580 he is coming down a flight together with his wife. On pages 228-230 we are within the mind of one of his sons. *Finnegans Wake* is not by any means the literal reproduction of this simple citizen's stream of night-thoughts (hardly a sentence of the work submits to such interpretation), but a view of his whole world, micro- and macrocosmic, through the eye of clairvoyant-sleep, instead of the eye that we are used to in the modern novel, namely that of day.

"I am Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," the mummy-soul perceives when awakened in the throne hall of Osiris.<sup>19</sup> The veil of time, as well as that of space, dissolves. But the mortal in life is implicated in the spectacle of the Manifold. (This is the meaning of the mythological image of the Fall: the One has become dispersed in and occluded by the contraries ["here and there," "then and now," "cause and effect," "means and ends," "good and evil," etc.] of Its cosmic manifestation: the Fall coincides with the blossoming of the lotus of the world.) What in eternity IS, now can be known only successively, as a process: past, present, and future.

Finnegan is past, Earwicker present; Earwicker's children are the future: the differing bodies are born and die. Yet when we peer with the eye of clairvoyant-sleep (Chaucer's "sweven") into the ephemeral individual, then the living moment, NOW, is perceived to be all that ever was ("O my shining stars and body!"—p. 4); and it is as though a hole had been opened through the wall of the flux that separates our minds from the forgotten Paradise in which God is dwelling.<sup>20</sup> Under conduct of our omniscient guide we rediscover "that One Man who sings in all of us";<sup>21</sup> that undisjointed Self, which is disjointed in the procession of the world. Through the quick of the sleeping Earwicker (that thread of life on which the millenniums have been strung like beads) we can peer back (and even forward) through the ages: all are instant in one luminous moment. And we behold in a single "stable somebody" those past heroes who once *were* the present which our modern man now *is*; who are identical with him in the eon, though in history they have long since passed away.

<sup>19</sup> *The Book of the Dead*, Chapter of the Coming Forth by Day in the Underworld, *loc. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> "Now by memory inspired, turn wheel again to the whole of the wall" (p. 69). Compare Nicholas of Cusa, *De vis. Dei* 9, 11, and Coomaraswamy, *op. cit.*, pp. 2, 25.

<sup>21</sup> St. Augustine, *loc. cit.* Compare *Bhagavad-Gita* 2. 18, 22.

This is how and why H. C. E. both is and is not the same as Finnegan. As the tavernkeeper of Chapelizod (Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker) he is not the titanic builder of the past, but as the Monad (Here Comes Everybody; Haveth Childers Everywhere) he *is* what Finnegan *was*. Fathoming the images of *Finnegans Wake* we are sounding not merely the fantasies of Earwicker's dreaming, but the powers, the presences, within the genes of his cells. We can plumb through them the abyss of the history of man, back to the moment when Adam left the finger of God. H. C. E. is that first mortal. He is also the survivor of the Deluge, the culture hero, the city founder, the patriarch, the king, and the marauder. He is the conquered. He is the vagabond, the voluptuary, and the saint. H. C. E., through the prism of time and space, has appeared, appears, and will go on reappearing, as though he were of many forms.<sup>22</sup>

## VI

But beneath and supporting this fluent self-multiplication in dream, reposes the dreamlessness of Finnegan, whose resurrection was foretold in the comic song. He is death, the past, dreamless sleep: the dark and mysterious substratum of the dream of life. His mummy is all that we can see. But in the throne room of Osiris he is consubstantial with the God; and when that is discovered (that deep point within him touched where the contraries of death and life, past and future, come together), then Tomorrow, Today, and Yesterday will be one again, Finnegan will

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<sup>22</sup> Compare C. G. Jung: "If it were permissible to personify the unconscious, we might call it a collective human being combining the characteristics of both sexes, transcending youth and age, birth and death, and, from having at his command a human experience of one or two million years, almost immortal. If such a being existed, he would be exalted above all temporal change; the present would mean neither more nor less to him than any year in the one-hundredth century before Christ; he would be a dreamer of age-old dreams and, owing to his immeasurable experience, he would be an incomparable prognosticator. He would have lived countless times over the life of the individual, of the family, tribe and people, and he would possess the living sense of the rhythm of growth, flowering and decay." (*Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, New York, 1936, p. 215.)

rouse, and the wake will end. "The whole thugogmagog, including the portions understood to be oddmitted as the results of the respective titulars neglecting to produce themselves, to be wound up for an afterenactment by a Magnificent Transformation Scene showing the Radium Wedding of Neid and Moorning and the Dawn of Peace, Pure, Perfect and Perpetual, Waking the Weary of the World" (p. 222).

"Life . . . is a wake" (p. 55); but when the Waked wakes what then of Earwig the Awaker?

# Postlude: Myth, Method, and the Future

by William Troy



Honneur des Hommes, Saint Langage,  
Discours prophétique et paré,  
Belles chaînes en qui s'engage  
Le dieu dans la chair égaré,  
Illumination, largesse!

—Paul Valéry

THE PRESENT ISSUE of *Chimera* should demonstrate, among other things, how many different approaches there are to the Myth—as a body of significant human materials, as a formal mode of interpretation, and above all perhaps as an attempt to give order and meaning to experience. To add one's few belated crumbs to the banquet of so many distinguished minds is of course to incur certain rather obvious risks. And what there is to add is not so much anything new as it is a reiterated emphasis. I merely wish to suggest that one cannot insist too much on the possible uses of the myth for the future.

Although conscious preoccupation with the myth has never been so widespread and intense as at the moment, it has never really waned throughout the ages, however much it may have seemed to during certain epochs. Jessie Weston, in a book that by now everybody has read, has shown beyond doubt to what extent the pre-Christian initiation pattern survived through the Middle Ages in the Grail romances. And certainly some of the greatest minds of the Renaissance—Pico, Bruno and Vico—were instinctively more attracted to the great myths of the past (particularly Bruno, whose *Triumphant Beast* served Joyce as one of the models for *Finnegans Wake*) than to the abstract improvisations of the schoolmen. *Shakespeare's Mystery Play*<sup>1</sup> (a book which unfortunately not enough people have read) defends brilliantly the

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<sup>1</sup> By Colin Still.

thesis that the Elizabethan mind was still so saturated with the old memories that *The Tempest* is best comprehended in terms of the ritual pattern. Even in the so-called Age of Reason the un-laid ghosts of the Age of Mystery rumbled unquietly beneath the deceiving surface. Masonism, Illuminatism, Swedenborgianism, were among the numerous cult-movements which had their origin in the eighteenth century, preparing the way for the full romantic revolt against the sway of "Bacon, Newton and Locke."

What actually happened with Blake and the Romantics was the frank and open re-admission of the myth into the Western consciousness. Since their time the history of the myth has consisted of shifting emphases within a more or less uniform pattern. For example, Faust, the hero all "will-to-know," heir of the Machiavellian phase of the Renaissance, yields to Prometheus, the hero all "will-to-do,"<sup>2</sup> precisely as the Western mind gave itself more and more to material power in all of its forms—war, imperialism and money. It is this which is unfolded in the grand manner in the Siegfried cycle, in which the modern *daimon* of money is embodied in the ancient symbol of the dragon—Fafnir. But by the middle of the century there is another shift—from man-against-Nature, or man-against-society (except for a few naturalists and the Marxists) to man-against-himself. This found its inevitable expression in the revival, by all the French Symbolists up to and including Proust, of the Narcissus legend, with its associated symbols of pool, mirror and solitary swan. With Yeats, George, Joyce and Mann, there is of course no longer any question of the degree of conscious deliberation to which our most important writers have turned to the myth for their various purposes: their works are woven of the whole cloth.

And that is the point of this perhaps unnecessary historical excursus. We have today reached the point at which we are interested not so much in the substance of particular myths as in the essential pattern or structure of myth in general. Indeed, we

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<sup>2</sup> The Satanic Man, especially in his later refinements, a Julien Sorel or a Ras-kolnikow, represents a fusion of the two in the hero who would conquer society by a process of "out-witting."

have come to wonder whether the word should be used in the plural at all. Perhaps there is, after all, only *one* myth—the Myth. And in that case the effort of the intellect can only be to determine more clearly its outline; to distinguish its order, if one prefers to consider it rather as a process; in brief, to establish what might be called its categories. Until this is accomplished we will not be able fully to realize all its uses for the richer interpretation of our literature and arts, not to mention our culture and individual selves. We must sharpen ever more finely the tools which it offers to our understanding. Here psychoanalysis has been helpful, largely in providing a vocabulary; anthropology and comparative religion have supplied materials and evidence. But these are disciplines in themselves, with their own divergent presuppositions and their own limiting reductions. What is possibly most in order at the moment is a thorough-going refurbishment of the medieval four-fold method of interpretation, which was first developed, it will be recalled, for just such a purpose—to make at least partially available to the reason that complex of human problems which are embedded, deep and inponderable, in the Myth.

*Littera gesta docet, quae credas Allegoria,  
Moralis quid agas, quo tendas Anagogia*

Of these four levels of meaning, surely the most important for us today is the last, the *anagogical*, which teaches us “whither we may turn ourselves.” For it should be implicit in this foot-note that if we are to be saved, which also assumes that we wish to be saved, it can only be through some reintegration of the Myth in terms of the heartbreaking concerns of the times. “The times are nightfall,” Hopkins said long ago, and they grow worse from hour to hour. Yet, when really everything has been said, are the most overwhelming problems of our age ultimately different from what have been the greatest problems of the race from its dark beginnings—love and justice? And it is exactly with these two problems above all else that the Myth is concerned. It is the cartograph of the perennial human situation, the more appealing

for being concrete, the more persuasive for being not subject to final analysis. The Myth provides us not merely with illustrations of destiny but with a guide to its better control and mastery—the anagogical. “We must love one another or die,” as Mr. Auden warns us. In a regenerated Myth alone we may hope to find a beckoning image of the successful alliance of the twin virtues of love and justice.

## About The Contributors



☆ JACQUES BARZUN, a Professor of History at Columbia, is the author of *Teacher in America*, *Romanticism and the Modern Ego*, etc. ☆ Now Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress for 1945-46, LOUISE BOGAN has written four books of poems, and has been the poetry reviewer for the *New Yorker* since 1931. ☆ HERMANN BROCH is the author of *The Sleepwalkers* and *The Death of Virgil*; he is at present at work on a book on mass psychology. ☆ JOSEPH CAMPBELL was co-author with H. M. Robinson of *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*, and has just completed the editing of the forthcoming posthumous volume of Heinrich Zimmer's *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*. A book by him on Comparative Mythology will be out soon. ☆ Author of *Confound the Wise*, NICOLAS CALAS is finishing a book of essays on the tragic sense of life, to be called *The New Prometheus*. ☆ ERICH KAHLER is the author of *Man the Measure*, published in this country, and a number of articles and books published abroad. He is now living in Princeton. ☆ Recently released from the Army, MARIO MONTEFORTE-TOLEDO is at work on a novel about the Tzutuhil Indians. Before the war he worked for the OWI and has for many years written for Latin-American papers. ☆ Critical articles by WILLIAM TROY have appeared in many literary magazines. He is now lecturing at the New School for Social Research. ☆ MARGUERITE YOURCENAR is the author of several books of novels and essays in French. She translated Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* into French, and also Henry James' *What Maisie Knew*, and some of the poems of the Greek poet Kavafiz. In this country she has lectured in numerous colleges on French literature and art. ☆ Our thanks are due to the writer and critic FRANCIS GOLFFING for valuable help on a translation.

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